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Madrid concedes stoppage-time equalizer against Atletico

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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PHOTO: PTI

India bounce back against England to level series

VISAKHAPATNAM, 5 FEB

Indian bowlers won an engrossing battle against England's firebrand batting for a series-levelling 106-run victory in the second Test here on Monday, blunting 'Bazball' with their resilience in a roller-coaster contest. England began day four at 67 for one, chasing a record target of 399. They were bowled out for 292 in the extended afternoon session. The visiting team's no holds barred approach, which has largely been successful, did not work on this occasion as India picked up nine wickets over the course of two sessions to bounce back in the five-match series. The third Test will be played in Rajkot from 15 February. "You know winning a Test in these conditions is not easy. (I) wanted our bowlers to step up and they did that," said an elated India skipper Rohit Sharma.

—PTI

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Farmers to march to Delhi on 13 Feb over MSP demand

CHANDIGARH, 5 FEB

Farmers will march to Delhi on 13 February to press the Centre for accepting several demands, including enactment of a law to guarantee MSP for crops, a top farm leader said on Monday. Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal claimed more than 200 farmers' unions from across the country will participate in the "Delhi Chalo" march. Addressing reporters in Chandigarh, Dallewal alleged that the Centre had made a commitment for giving legal guarantee to Minimum Support Price (MSP) when the farmers protested against the three now-repealed farm laws.But the government is not fulfilling its promise because of pressure from the corporate sector, Dallewal claimed. Sarwan Singh Pandher, General Secretary of the Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee, said besides legal guarantee for MSP, the farmers are also demanding implementation of the Swaminathan Commission's recommendations, pension for farmers and farm labourers, farm debt waiver.

—PTI

Champai-led JMM-Cong govt wins trust vote in Jharkhand

The alliance govt secured 47 votes in the 81-member Assembly

Ranchi, 5 Feb

Jharkhand's JMM-led coalition government headed by Chief Minister Champai Soren won the vote of confidence on Monday after getting 47 votes in the 81-member Assembly.

Following this, the ruling alliance claimed that it was a "slap" on the face of BJP that tried to destabilise a democratically elected government.

While 29 legislators voted against the motion, Independent legislator Saryu Roy abstained. Seventy-seven MLAs were present in the Assembly during the voting, in which arrested former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren also participated.

Taking part in the debate, the JMM President Hemant Soren challenged BJP to prove the corruption charges against him, asserting that if the accusations were proved, he would quit politics.

Hemant, who is in ED custody and was allowed by a special PMLA (Prevention of Money Laundering Act) court to participate in the trust vote, also launched a scathing attack against BJP and alleged that the Raj Bhavan was instrumental in his arrest after a "conspiracy hatched by the Centre". Claiming that Tribals would be forced to shun their religion as BR Ambedkar was compelled to convert to Buddhism, he alleged that BJP considers Tribals "untouchable".

Champai Soren with Hemant Soren and grand-alliance MLAs after the floor test in the Assembly, in Ranchi on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with Kalpana Soren, wife of Hemant Soren during a meeting in Jharkhand *PHOTO: PTI*

HC to hear Hemant's plea against ED action on 12 Feb

Ranchi, 5 Feb

Jharkhand High Court will hear a petition by arrested ex-chief minister Hemant Soren against the ED action on 12 February, his counsel Advocate General Rajeev Ranjan said on Monday. High Court also asked ED to file its reply on Soren's petition. *—PTI*

Champai took oath as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand on 2 February, after Hemant was arrested by Enforcement Directorate in a money laundering case after over seven hours of questioning last week.

When the former chief minister reached the assembly, the ruling JMM-led alliance MLAs greeted him with slogans like 'Hemant Soren zindabad'.

In his address, Jharkhand Governor CP Radhakrishnan said the task was to make Jharkhand corruption-free and prosperous.

Congratulating the ruling coalition on winning the trust vote, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi at a rally here said: "Want to congratulate all alliance MLAs, (Champai) Soren ji as they stopped the BJP-RSS conspiracy and protected the government of the poor". The rally was part of his Manipur-to-Maharashtra 'Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra'.

The majority alliance has 47 MLAs -- JMM 29, Congress 17 and RJD 1 in the 81-member Jharkhand assembly. The BJP has 26 members and the AJSU Party has three. *—PTI*

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday hit out at Centre for reduction in tax devolution to State *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

'State lost ₹1.8L cr during 15th Finance panel'

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday hit out at Centre for reduction in tax devolution to State from Central divisible pool.

He said state has incurred a total loss of Rs 1.87 lakh crore during five years under the 15th finance commission due to declining Central grants and urged that they be set right.

The Interim Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on 1 February was supposed to allot 42 per cent of tax share due to the State, but it allotted only 35 per cent, Siddaramaiah said, highlighting the data on tax shares sanctioned to the State. Siddaramaiah said Northern India got a higher share in the budget compared to Southern India.

The Central government owes Rs 73,593 crore in total to State over the years in terms of taxes and project funds. The State government had requested Rs 3,000 crore for Peripheral Ring Road project and Rs 3,000 crore for the development and rejuvenation of lakes in the City. Adding to it, Finance Commission recommended Rs 5,495 crore for the State during the interim budget this year but Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman rejected it. The tax share to the State has been declining every financial year since 2020-2021 and it has added up to Rs 62,098 crore. *—Salar News*

CM requests all MLAs to join Delhi protest

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah requested all the ministers, Members of Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament, irrespective of the parties to join the protest by State government in New Delhi. The protest will draw the attention of the Centre and the nation towards the injustice meted out to Karnataka by the Centre.

—Salar News

THE BUDGET INJUSTICE

14TH FINANCE COMMISSION

Criteria	Share per cent	Ktaka's Score	Ktaka's share
Population	17.5%	5.395	0.94
Demographic change	10.0%	5.132	0.51
Income distance	50.0%	4.187	2.09
Area	15%	4.794	0.75
Forest cover	7.5%	5.550	0.42
Total			4.713

15TH FINANCE COMMISSION

Criteria	Share per cent	Ktaka's score	Ktaka's share
Population	15.0%	5.186	0.78
Demographic change	12.5%	6.207	0.78
Income distance	45.0%	1.103	0.50
Tax effort	2.5%	5.792	0.14
Area	15.0%	5.383	0.81
Forest cover	10.0%	6.442	0.64
Total			3.646

14th FC used 1971 census, 15th FC used 2011 census

Maldives asks Indian troops to leave by May

MALE, 5 FEB

President Muizzu *PHOTO: AP*

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu on Monday said the first group of Indian military personnel will be sent back from the island nation before 10 March and the remaining manning two aviation platforms will be withdrawn before 10 May, as he articulated the need to bolster the Indian Ocean archipelagic nation's military capabilities.

In his maiden address to Parliament, Muizzu, widely seen as a pro-China leader, said the support of a large majority of the Maldivian citizens for his administration was for the "pledges to withdraw foreign military troops from the country."

Soon after taking oath as the President of Maldives, Muizzu formally requested India to withdraw 88 military personnel from his country by 15 March, saying the Maldivian people have given him a "strong mandate" to make this request to New Delhi.

In the presidential runoff held in September last year, Muizzu, 45, defeated India-friendly incumbent Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

His government is also reviewing more than 100 bilateral agreements signed with India by the previous government.

The main opposition party, the Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) – which holds a majority in Parliament – on Sunday announced that it would boycott Muizzu's address to Parliament, at this year's inaugural sitting.

—PTI

HITS OUT AT CONG, NEHRU

PM predicts 370 seats for BJP, over 400 for NDA in LS polls

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Narendra Modi replies to the 'Motion of Thanks' on the President's address, in the Lok Sabha in New Delhi on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday expressed confidence that the NDA will get more than 400 seats and the BJP will win at least 370 seats in the Lok Sabha elections.

Modi said he was convinced that the opposition parties have lost the courage to contest elections and have resolved to stay on the opposition benches for a long time.

"I can gauge the mood of the nation, it will definitely give NDA more than 400 seats and the BJP at least 370 seats," the Prime Minister said replying to the debate in Lok Sabha on the Motion of Thanks on President's Address.

He said the third term of the government was not too far. "At the most 100-125 days are remaining," he said, referring to the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. "Abki baar," Modi said, and BJP members joined him in unison to say "400 paar".

"Even Kharge ji is saying the same thing," Modi said referring to Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's statement in Rajya Sabha. He said the NDA's third term would be the one that would see big decisions and lay the foundation for the next 1,000 years.

Prime Minister Modi tore into the Congress, attacking it on the issue of dynastic politics and saying it had a good opportunity to play a good opposition but failed in that role. *—PTI*

'SHAKTI' DISPLAY AT GRAMMYS

5 Indians bag Grammys, Zakir Hussain gets 3

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Shankar Mahadevan, Ganesh Rajagopalan Ustad Zakir Hussain and V Selvaganesh pose for photos after winning best global music album for 'This Moment' during 66th Grammy Awards *PHOTO: PTI*

Indian music struck a chord at the 2024 Grammy Awards with five Indian musicians, including tabla maestro Zakir Hussain and flautist Rakesh Chaurasia, picking up the coveted prize at a glittering ceremony in Los Angeles.

While Hussain was India's big winner with three Grammys, Rakesh Chaurasia picked up two. Singer Shankar Mahadevan, violinist Ganesh Rajagopalan and percussionist Selvaganesh Vinayakram, Hussain's collaborators in the fusion group Shakti, won one Grammy each at the event held at the Crypto.com Arena Sunday night.

Shakti won the 2024 Grammy Award for best global music album for "This Moment". The album features the four Indians as well as its founding member, the legendary British guitarist John McLaughlin. "This Moment", which released to critical acclaim in June 2023, is the group's first studio album in more than 45 years.

Besides his award for Shakti, Hussain won two other awards -- the best global music performance for "Pashto" and best contemporary instrumental album for "As We Speak".

Rakesh Chaurasia, nephew of legendary flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia, won two Grammys as part of the ensemble of American banjo player Bela Fleck and American bassist Edgar Meyer for "Pashto" and "As We Speak".In a post on X, the prime minister praised the five artists for making India proud at the Grammys, saying their "exceptional talent and dedication to music" had won hearts worldwide.

- Rakesh Chaurasia, nephew of legendary flautist Hariprasad Chaurasia, won two Grammys as part of the ensemble of American banjo player Bela Fleck and American bassist Edgar Meyer for "Pashto".

In 2008, six Indians -- Rahman, H Sridhar, P A Deepak, Gulzar, Tanvi Shah, and Hussain -- won the Grammys across categories.

Rakesh Chaurasia said he was "happy and honoured" to bring two Grammys home to India. Mahadevan, who took the stage alongside Rajagopalan and Selvaganesh, gave a shoutout to McLaughlin and Hussain. While McLaughlin gave the ceremony a miss, Hussain was backstage as he had won another Grammy.

Rajagopalan thanked the Recording Academy for the recognition.Sitar virtuoso Ravi Shankar was the first musician from India to win a Grammy Award (best chamber music performance) in 1968. Since then, several musicians from the country, including Indian-origin Zubin Mehta and Anoushka Shankar as well as Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, L Shankar, and T H Vinayakram, have received Grammys in various categories. *—PTI*

Lanka arrests 23 fishermen for poaching in its waters

COLOMBO, 5 FEB

The 23 fishermen and their two trawlers were escorted to the Kankesanthurai Harbour *PHOTO: PTI*

Sri Lankan Navy has arrested 23 Indian fishermen and seized two trawlers for allegedly poaching in the island nation's waters, according to an official statement here.

The fishermen were arrested, and their two trawlers were seized on Saturday north of the Delft Island, Jaffna, the Sri Lanka Navy said in a press release on Sunday.

The 23 apprehended fishermen and their two trawlers were escorted to the Kankesanthurai Harbour and will be handed over to the Mailadi Fisheries Inspector for further action, it said.

"The Sri Lanka Navy conducted a special operation to chase away Indian poaching trawlers from Sri Lankan waters on the night of 3 February, 2024. The operation resulted in the seizure of 2 Indian trawlers and the apprehension of 23 Indian nationals poaching in the northern waters of Sri Lanka, off the Delft Island in Jaffna, the statement said.

The Navy conducts regular patrols and operations in Sri Lankan waters to curb illegal fishing practices by foreign fishing trawlers, taking into account the consequences of these practices on the livelihood of local fishermen.

There have been periodic instances of Indian fishermen being arrested by Sri Lankan authorities for allegedly crossing the International Maritime Boundary Line and fishing in Sri Lankan waters.

In January, as many as 36 Indian fishermen were arrested by Sri Lanka.

—PTI

BJP's Mandya unit pushes for LS seat

MANDYA, 5 FEB

A district executive meeting of BJP held here has demanded the party to contest from Mandya and Hassan constituencies in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, challenging the alliance that the saffron party has with Janata Dal (Secular). Former MLA Preetham Gowda and former minister SA Ram Das were among those who participated in the meeting held at Pandavpur. Gowda said BJP workers want the party not to give away key constituencies such as Mandya and Hassan to JD(S). Mandya emerges as a pivotal constituency, where JD(S) has traditionally held sway but faced stiff competition from BJP in the past elections. With Sumalatha, the current MP from Mandya, expressing support for BJP, the demand for the party's representation in the seat gains momentum. Sumalatha has indicated her willingness to compete in the upcoming elections. Former minister Gowda joined the chorus advocating for MP Sumalatha, considering her contributions and commitment to Mandya. *—Salar News*

3 arrested for moral policing

MANGALURU, 3 FEB

Police arrested three pro-Hindu workers in connection with a case of moral policing and harassment of a couple at Panambur beach on Monday. The couple, hailing from Kerala and Bengaluru respectively, was visiting the beach when they were detained by a group of three pro-Hindu workers from Rama Sena. The workers intercepted them and questioned why they, being from different regions, were together. Upon being informed, the accused were arrested by the Panambur police, who filed FIRs against them. Investigations into the matter unveiled the accused's prior criminal histories, which included involvement in instances of moral policing. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah has directed the police to take decisive action against those implicated in such incidents of moral policing. *—Salar News*

Youth held for rape and blackmail

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

A 25-year-old youth was arrested for raping a minor girl and blackmailing her to make her private videos and photos in Nelamangala Town. Shivakumar Hosahalli, a resident of Chikkapet, met the 16-year-old victim in Udupi in 2018 at a programme. They became acquaintances. In March 2018, the accused visited the victim, raped her and captured her videos and photos. By blackmailing her, he repeatedly raped her and extorted Rs 85,000 from her. The victim confided everything to her parents, and they lodged a complaint at Nelamangala Town. The police have filed the case under sections of IPC, IT Act, and POCSO Act. *—Salar News*

Suttur Jathra fest begins today

MYSURU, 5 FEB

Jatra Mahotsava, also known as Suttur Jathra, will begin at Suttur in Nanjangud here on Tuesday. Organised under the auspices of Shivaratri Deshikendra Swamiji of Suttur Veerasimhasana Mahasamsthana mutt, the annual extravaganza features a week-long celebration of spirituality, culture, agriculture and tradition. The festivities, which will run till 11 February on the banks of Kapila river, showcase the rich heritage and diversity of the region. One of the highlights of the event is an agriculture fair, featuring demonstrations on "how to farm profitably with less water in drought". The fair will also host an exhibition of agricultural implements, providing a platform for farmers to explore innovative tools and techniques. The event will also host cultural, religious, entertainment programmes and health check-up camps. Other attractions include a mass wedding, a state-level bhajan mela, traditional desi games, rangoli competitions, religious assemblies, painting and kite competitions, wrestling tournaments, Theppotsavam, Kapila aarti and Laksha Deepotsava. *—Salar News*

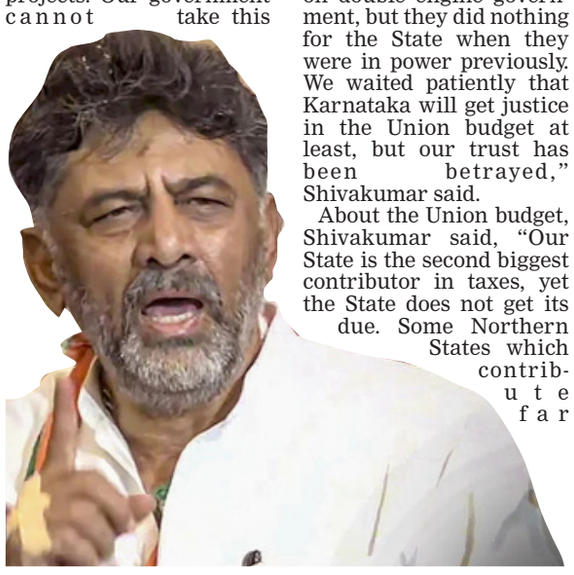
DKS: Cannot be silent spectator of injustice

Centre constantly doing injustice to State: Dy CM

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Monday said the Congress party will not be a silent spectator for the injustice against the State by the BJP-led Central government.

"The BJP government in the Centre has been constantly doing injustice to Karnataka - be it Covid relief, drought relief, MGNREGA or irrigation projects. Our government cannot take this silently anymore," Shivakumar said. "We have to unitedly fight to get justice for the State. The people of the State have reposed faith and given us an opportunity and we have to repay that debt. We have been cooperating with the Centre as we believe in federalism. We have been watching the injustice caused to the State for the last ten years," he said.



"The BJP keeps harping on double engine government, but they did nothing for the State when they were in power previously. We waited patiently that Karnataka will get justice in the Union budget at least, but our trust has been betrayed," Shivakumar said.

About the Union budget, Shivakumar said, "Our State is the second biggest contributor in taxes, yet the State does not get its due. Some Northern States which contribute far lesser taxes are given much higher funds than Karnataka. We must raise this issue with the Centre and create awareness among the people of Karnataka. We intend to do that with the protest on 7 February."

> **We waited patiently that Karnataka will get justice in the Union budget at least, but our trust has been betrayed**
>
> -DK Shivakumar, Deputy Chief Minister

Calling upon MLAs, MLCs and MPs to participate in the protest irrespective of parties, Shivakumar said, "We must open the eyes of Central leaders to this grave injustice. The Chief Minister has written a letter regarding this to Prime Minister and I have called on Union ministers and have appraised them of this injustice. But nothing has happened. The State hasn't received any funds for drought relief," he said.

"The law has provision to increase the number of employment days in MGNREGA from 100 days to 150 days but the Centre is not doing that either. How long can we sit and watch this injustice? This protest is for justice, livelihood, economic independence of the people of Karnataka."

About Union Finance Minister Niramala Sitharaman's statement that she has no role in the State's finances, he said, "I know Nirmala Sitharaman is smart. She represents Karnataka in Rajya Sabha and she is responsible for the State. She had announced Rs 5,300 crore for the Upper Bhadra project in the previous budget. The Finance Minister has every right to address disparities in Finance Commissions. She announced many projects for GIFT city in Gujarat, so why can't she announce a GIFT city for Karnataka?"

About Sitharaman's comment that the State government has money to spend on guarantee schemes, he said, "Karnataka government can manage the guarantees it has announced. Let the Centre give us our due share and we will manage the finances of our State." *—Salar News*

BYV: Siddaramaiah govt most unpopular in State's history

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Karnataka BJP President BY Vijayendra criticised Congress government on Monday over the allegedly worsening financial situation in the State and accused the Siddaramaiah administration of shirking its responsibility while "unnecessarily" blaming the BJP-led Centre for its woes.

Vijayendra raised two issues in particular, one to do with an incentive scheme for farmers and the other over the development funds of MLAs.

He said the government has stopped an incentive scheme for dairy farmers launched by the earlier BJP dispensation headed by BS Yediyurappa. The milk producers are owed a total of Rs 700 crore, the payment of which has been pending for the past few months, he said.

Citing the drought in the State, Vijayendra demanded that Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, who holds

BY Vijayendra *PHOTO: PTI*

> **Is it not the responsibility of the State government to come to the rescue of the farmers during drought**
>
> -BY Vijayendra, Karnataka BJP President

charge of the finance ministry, immediately release the dues to the distressed dairy farmers. "Otherwise, farmers along with cattle...will come to the streets and protest against the State's Congress government," he warned. "Is it not the responsibility of the State government to come to the rescue of the farmers during drought," he asked, slamming the Congress leaders for "trying to escape" from their responsibility by "unnecessarily blaming the Central government and (Prime Minister Narendra) Modiji on every occasion."

On the issue of MLAs' development funds, he alleged that not a single rupee has been released by the government. "The financial position...of the State is worsening day by day," he claimed, remarking that "this is the most unpopular State government in the history of Karnataka."

Vijayendra also said Dalits in the State are in distress as the government has diverted the "entire funds of Rs 11,600 crore", meant for their welfare, to other programmes. "And today the Congress is blaming BJP and Modiji," he alleged. *—PTI*

STATE TO FILL 449 VACANCIES IN PANCHAYAT RAJ

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Minister Rural Development & Panchayat Raj Priyank Kharge said that there is a shortage of employees in the Panchayat Raj and Rural Development department and steps are being taken to fill the 449 vacant positions. Addressing concerns about youth unemployment, Minister Priyank Kharge said, "The recent release of the final select list for engineers, including 25 posts for Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE), 288 for Assistant Engineer (AE), and 136 for Junior Engineer (JE) is still pending.

Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) conducts these exams annually to fill various government positions. "Still 449 positions remain vacant and the government plans to rope in youths to the department to fill the gap." Kharge said.

Further, Kharge accused BJP of procuring IT peripherals at inflated costs. *—Salar News*

BSY HITS BACK AT CONG

'15 Finance panel gave higher share than previous one'

Former chief minister BS Yediyurappa *PHOTO:PTI*

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

After Congress government accused Centre of improper tax devolution, former Chief Minister BS Yediyurappa on Monday said NDA government has already allocated Rs 1,16,828 crore as recommended by 15th Finance Commission to Karnataka. "The 15th Finance Commission's tenure is up to 2026 and the total tax allocation will be over Rs 2.5 lakh crore. This is higher than the 14th Finance Commission recommendation during the Congress-led UPA government," he said.

Yediyurappa said, "Siddaramaiah government is directly responsible for State government's share falling to 3.6 per cent in the 15th fiscal because the Siddaramaiah government was in the state when the fiscal report was prepared. Failing to reflect the true financial condition of the State, it failed to convince the Finance Commission."

> **15th Finance Commission's tenure is up to 2026 and the total tax allocation will be over Rs 2.5 lakh crore. This is higher than 14th Finance Commission recommendation during the Congress-led UPA government**
>
> -BS Yediyurappa, BJP leader

Yediyurappa said in the last three years, the State received Rs 13,985 crore from the Centre. This year, about Rs 3,500 crore of grants will come to the State government.

Claiming that the State government is lying, Yediyurappa said, "Siddaramaiah thinks that he can hide the truth by lying repeatedly. But on Monday, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman also gave a suitable answer in the House." *—Salar News*

NIRMALA NIXES CLAIMS ON FUND DISPARITY

Nirmala Sitharaman *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday came down heavily on allegations that the Centre is withholding funds meant for non-BJP governed states, saying it is a "politically-vitiated narrative" that "vested interests" are happy to go about saying.

Replying to a question by Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in the Lok Sabha on the Karnataka government's claim that the Centre is not releasing funds due to it, Sitharaman said such a situation cannot happen as the "system is well placed" and the central government works according to recommendations of the Finance Commission.

"This apprehension that some states are being discriminated against is a politically-vitiated narrative," she said.

Sitharaman added that no Union finance minister can play with the Finance Commission's recommendations. "This is just not a possibility that any Finance Minister can intervene to say that 'I don't like this state, stop payment' ... It can't happen that way. The system is well placed," she said. *—PTI*

SOARING HIGH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah flagged off 100 upgraded versions of Karnataka Sarige buses, operated by KSRTC, on Monday. The new buses are branded Ashwamedha Classic. *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Junnasandra lake encroached using fake documents: AAP

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

- High court's decision led to the conversion of Junnasandra Lake into a private ownership

High court's recent decision which led to the conversion of the 25-acre Junnasandra Lake, into a private ownership has drawn flak from AAP.

Addressing a press conference, Mohan Dasari, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) State Secretary said that a significant portion of the lake, around 24.33 acres, has been encroached upon by individuals using fake documents. These documents trace back to an agreement between the then Maharaja of Mysuru and a woman by the name Jodidara Akkamma in 1930. However, the authenticity of these claims has been called into question, especially given the enactment of the Land Reforms Act in 1967.

Despite several complaints filed regarding the illegal encroachment, court's ruling last year on 21 December upheld the 1930 agreement, favouring the descendants of Jodidara Akkamma. However, the court order did not specifically mention the lake yard as part of the agreement.

Dasari accused former Bommai, former revenue minister R Ashoka, and former MLA Arvind Limbavali of being involved in the illegal land encroachment. He revealed that a complaint has been lodged with the Bangalore Metropolitan Task Force regarding this matter.

Ashok Murthyunjaya, AAP's organizing Secretary and State Spokesperson, warned of potential water scarcity in Mahadevapura due to the encroachment. He highlighted the urgency of the situation and called for immediate action from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to address the illegal activity.

AAP demanded the preservation of the lake yard, which is a public property, and called for the formation of an emergency judicial committee to investigate the matter thoroughly. *—Salar News*

Water sources deplete in Hanur

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 5 FEB

Hanur taluk in Chamarajanagar district, which is known for its lush environs, is grappling with a severe water crisis despite having several reservoirs. The lakes in the taluk are experiencing a decline in water levels, and the groundwater is depleting, causing distress among local farmers.

Encroachment of lakes is a major factor in the depletion of water bodies. The water levels in reservoirs such as Hubbehunase, Gundal, Ramanagudda, Uduthore, Minyattahalla in Yarambadi and Gopinatham are depleting, disrupting agricultural activities.

Among the lakes in Hanur taluk, 10 fall under Minor Irrigation Department, one under Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited and 70 under the gram panchayat. The residents have been demanding a project to fill these reservoirs to boost groundwater levels and facilitate irrigation in adjacent lands.

The residents also urged authorities to clean the lakes as they are plagued by stagnant water, lack of maintenance, overgrowth of vegetation and silt accumulation.

A comprehensive survey detailing the depth and extent of all lakes in the taluk is recommended to understand the extent of encroachment.

Anand Prakash Meena, CEO of Zilla Panchayat, said they will prioritise lake development in the region. *—Salar News*

Jal Jeevan funds ploy to divert attention: Mamata

KOLKATA, 5 FEB

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee *PHOTO: PTI*

- West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday expressed displeasure at Centre for allocating over Rs 950 crore to State for 'Jal Jeevan Mission' project

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday expressed displeasure at Centre for allocating over Rs 950 crore to State for 'Jal Jeevan Mission' project and termed it as a political ploy ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha elections, a source said.

Banerjee, who chaired Monday's Cabinet meeting, believes that this allocation is a tactic by the Central government to divert attention from the state's demands for unpaid dues under Central government schemes, the source added.

Last Friday, the Centre allocated Rs 951.57 crore for Bengal, the day when the Trinamool Congress supremo started a 48-hour dharna demanding release of funds due to the state under welfare schemes including 100 days' work and PMGAY. "The Centre and the states are equal partners under the mission. That means the state government also has to spend a similar amount for this project and have to deposit it in the escrow account. The Centre in its letter to the state mentioned that this money cannot be used in any other sector," he added.

At the meeting, Banerjee also expressed her discontentment stating that the Centre was trying to take all the credit for the scheme despite the state government playing a much more important role in realising the project starting from land selection and subsequent reforms, he said.

The Jal Jeevan Mission is envisioned to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024 to all households in rural India.

In other developments, the Cabinet approved the expansion of Kolkata Police jurisdiction to include a portion of the Narendrapur police station, which is currently under Baruipur police district. Narendrapur police station will be divided into three police stations and two out of them will be brought under Kolkata Police. *—PTI*

SPYING CASE

Indian Embassy staff sent to judicial custody

LUCKNOW, 5 FEB

A Lucknow Court on Monday sent an Indian embassy staffer arrested for allegedly spying for Pakistan's intelligence agency ISI to judicial custody till 7 February.

The Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) of the Uttar Pradesh Police on Sunday said it arrested Satendra Siwal, a resident of the state's Hapur district, in Lucknow after questioning as he could not give satisfactory answers and confessed his crime.

Siwal has been working as an IBSA (India-Based Security Assistant) in the Indian embassy in Moscow since 2021.

An FIR was lodged at the ATS police station in Gomtinagar on February 3 against Siwal under section 121A (waging war against the country) of the IPC and sections 3,5 and 9 of the Official Secrets Act.

Satendra Siwal *PHOTO: PTI*

- Lucknow resident Satendra Siwal has been working as an IBSA (India-Based Security Assistant) in the Indian embassy in Moscow since 2021.

The accused was presented before the court of Additional Session Judge VS Tripathi, who sent him to judicial custody earlier in the day.

The ATS filed a plea for Siwal's police custody, and the judge ordered that the man be presented in court on Tuesday for the hearing on the same.

The ATS has alleged that Siwal provided confidential information regarding the strategic activities of the Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of External Affairs and the Indian military establishments to the ISI for money. *—PTI*

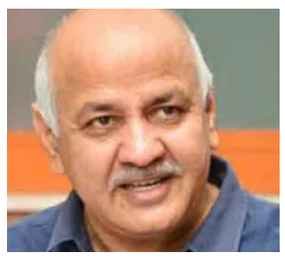


PHOTO: PTI

Court lets Sisodia visit wife once a week while in custody

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

A court here on Monday allowed senior AAP leader Manish Sisodia, arrested in a Delhi excise policy case, to visit his ailing wife once a week while in custody. Special judge M K Nagpal also extended the judicial custody of Sisodia till 22 February after he was produced before the court on the expiry of his remand granted earlier. The judge passed the order while adjourning his bail application in excise policy-related cases filed by the CBI and the ED. Sisodia sought custody parole to visit his ailing wife twice a week. The judge, directed the CBI to file a detailed status report about its further investigation in connection with the alleged excise policy case by 22 February, the next date of hearing. The judge passed the direction to the CBI after defence counsel objected to "non-full disclosure" about the status of the investigation. *—PTI*

SC reserves order on Tejashwi's defamation plea

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Supreme Court reserved its order on a plea filed by RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav seeking transfer of the criminal defamation complaint pending against him on Monday. The complaint was over his alleged "only Gujaratis can be thugs" remark to a place outside the state, preferably Delhi. A bench of Justices AS Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan took on record a fresh statement of apology filed by Yadav. After Yadav was asked to file a proper statement with his remark, on 19 January he filed an affidavit in the apex court withdrawing his alleged statement. The top court, while hearing the RJD leader's plea, had earlier stayed the proceedings in the criminal defamation complaint and issued notice to the Gujarat resident who had filed it. *—PTI*

Respite to Kavitha from ED to continue as SC adjourns plea

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The respite to BRS leader K Kavitha from appearance before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for questioning in the Delhi excise policy case will continue as the Supreme Court on Monday adjourned her petition challenging the agency's summons to 16 February. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Pankaj Mithal deferred the matter after senior advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Kavitha, said the matter may be listed for final hearing. Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for the ED, told the court that Kavitha is avoiding summons and not appearing before the agency. *—PTI*

Sanjay Singh not allowed to take oath as RS MP

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Jailed AAP leader Sanjay Singh, who has been re-elected to Rajya Sabha from Delhi, on Monday could not take oath as it was not listed in the business of the House, sources in the Rajya Sabha secretariat said.Singh, who is in judicial custody in a money laundering case linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam, came to Parliament to take oath following permission from a Delhi court.AAPsaid Singh should have been allowed to take oath but official sources cited the August 11th direction of the Upper House that Singh's suspension for unruly conduct during the Monsoon session will remain in force and he cannot attend proceedings till the Privileges Committee submits its report and it is considered by the House. That the matter pertains to Singh's previous term has no impact on this, they said. *—PTI*

Murder of democracy: SC on C'garh mayoral polls

SC orders prosecution of the poll's Returning Officer

NEW DELHI/ CHANDIGARH, 5 FEB

Supreme Court on Monday rapped the Returning Officer who conducted the recent Chandigarh mayoral polls, observing it is obvious he defaced the ballot papers and that he should be prosecuted, adding his action amounted to "murder" and "mockery" of democracy.

An "appalled" Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, who headed a three-judge Division bench, said it will not allow democracy to be murdered like this and that the apex court will order fresh elections if not satisfied with the purity of the poll process.

Asking whether the Returning Officer(RO) is an officer or a fugitive, the court also ordered preservation of ballots and the video of the poll proceedings besides seeking his personal appearance during the next hearing in the Chandigarh mayoral polls case on 19 February.

The top court gave the order after it took note of the allegations in the plea of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) councillor Kuldeep Kumar, who lost the mayoral poll, that the RO squiggled eight ballot papers of councillors of the Congress-AAP alliance, rendering them invalid.

Manoj Sonkar of BJP defeated AAP's Kuldeep Kumar polling 16 votes against his rival's 12 to bag the Mayor's post *PHOTO: PTI*

- BJP swept the Chandigarh mayoral polls on 30 January, retaining all three posts, in a setback to the Congress-AAP alliance that alleged tampering with ballot papers by the presiding officer

BJP swept the Chandigarh mayoral polls on 30 January, retaining all three posts, in a setback to the Congress-AAP alliance that alleged tampering with ballot papers by the presiding officer.

"Lordships have only one side of the picture. Don't form an opinion based on something said selectively," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Chandigarh authorities, told the bench which also comprised justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. The bench directed that the entire records, pertaining to the election of the mayor, be "sequestered under the custody of the Registrar of the Punjab and Haryana High Court" by 5 pm on Monday by the Deputy Commissioner of Chandigarh, the present custodian of records.

AAP and Congress hailed the court observations, saying it was a "tight slap" on the face of BJP.

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said the rap by the court showed that "democracy was murdered", asserting that people will give a befitting reply.

Punjab Congress president Amrinder Singh Raja Warring in his post on X said, "Hon'ble SC's observation regarding the botched up Chandigarh Mayor elections that it was a mockery of democracy further vindicated the accusations against the @BJP4India of rigging elections."

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sandeep Pathak welcomed the observations, saying it is because of such decisions that people's "hopes are pinned on the legal system". *—PTI*

CRIMINAL DEFAMATION CASE

Delhi HC refuses to quash summons against Kejriwal

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Delhi High Court upheld summons issued to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as an accused in a criminal defamation case for retweeting an allegedly defamatory video circulated by YouTuber Dhruv Rathee in May 2018.

Retweeting a social media post carrying defamatory content will amount to defamation under Section 499 of the IPC, Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma said while refusing to quash the trial court's 2019 order summoning Kejriwal.

The court also said that some sense of responsibility must be attached while retweeting content on social media about which a person does not have knowledge.

Arvind Kejriwal *PHOTO: PTI*

A magistrate's court had summoned Kejriwal to appear before it in August 2019 after a criminal complaint by the founder of social media page, "I Support Narendra Modi", alleged the AAP leader had retweeted the defamatory video.

"The complainant alleges that the allegations made against him in this video are false, malicious and defamatory and it has lowered the reputation of the complainant in the eyes of right-thinking members of the society. So far, no proof has been tendered on the allegations,"

He said Kejriwal is followed by crores of people "due to which the video has reached a large number of people not only in India but also internationally". *—PTI*

'TMC leader sent ration scam money overseas'

KOLKATA, 5 FEB

Enforcement Directorate said TMC leader Shankar Adhya, arrested in connection with an alleged multi-crore ration scam in West Bengal, siphoned off money to a Dubai-based company's account.

Adhya, former chairman of Bangaon Municipality, owns a foreign exchange company in Petrapole area along India-Bangladesh border, and his relatives also run around 90 such companies, which were used to siphon off funds outside the country. He had also opened a company in Dubai, registered under his son's name, with the help of another accused in the scam who was arrested in October 2023, the official said. *—PTI*

STATE BUDGET

Liquor prices, court fee to cost more in Kerala

T'PURAM, FEB 5

In order to generate additional funds for development works, CPI(M) government in Kerala increased the liquor prices and judicial court fees in the budget presented on Monday.

Excise duty on Indian-made foreign liquor (IMFL) has been hiked by Rs 10per litre to generate revenue of Rs 200 crore, state Finance Minister K N Balagopal said while presenting the fourth budget of the second Pinarayi Vijayan government.

Court fee and electricity duty on those generating their own electric power have also increased in the budget for the fiscal 2024-25 "The Abkari law permits levying a gallonage fee of up to Rs 30 per litre on the sale of Indian-made foreign liquor. This has been set at 10 rupees per litre. Through this, an additional revenue of Rs 200 crore is expected," said Balagopal. The budget also proposed an enhancement of 15 paise per unit in the electricity duty for consumers who generate and consume energy for their own consumption, eying an additional revenue of Rs 24 crore.Balagopal further said that suitable amendments will be incorporated to find ways to mobilise more revenue from the area *—PTI*

UP presents ₹7.36 lakh crore budget for FY25

LUCKNOW, 5 FEB

Uttar Pradesh government on Monday presented the budget for financial year 2024-25 with an allocation of Rs 7.36 lakh crore, prioritising infrastructure development as well as welfare of women, youths and farmers.

The budget has set the target of 5.1 per cent growth rate for the agriculture sector in the state, while allocating Rs 4,000 crore for distribution of tablets/smart phones to students and Rs 1,750 crore for the development of 'dharmarthmarg' (roads to religious places).

It has provided Rs 100 crore to the state's culture department for organising Mahakumbh-2025. An additional Rs 2,500 crore has been allocated to the urban development department with a view to develop world-class infrastructure in cities.

The policies of the state are particularly dedicated to the upliftment of the youth, women, farmers, and the underprivileged sections, the Uttar Pradesh government said.

With an aim to achieve a 5.1 per cent growth in agriculture, a provision of Rs 460 crore has been made for three new agriculture-related schemes.An outlay of Rs 2,400 crore has been proposed for providing electricity at concessional rates to private tube wells of farmers. *—PTI*

PARL PANEL SAYS

'Govt must de-politicise UNSC terror sanctions'

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

A parliamentary standing committee on Monday called on the government to make persistent efforts to ensure "de-politicisation" of the UN Security Council's sanctions regime on the listing of terrorists and terror entities even as it noted that India remains a recruitment target for global terror groups such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The report by the panel on external affairs came against the backdrop of China blocking the listing of a number of Pakistan-based terrorists by the United Nations Security Council's sanctions committee. The committee noted that the problem of terrorism in India is largely sponsored from across the border as terrorist outfits are provided safe havens, material support, finance and other logistics by Pakistan's spy agency ISI to carry out terrorist activities.The committee was of the firm view that terrorist attacks in the country can only be curbed by dismantling all terrorist networks and safe havens.

The report came against the backdrop of China blocking the listing of a number of Pakistan based terrorists *PHOTO: AP*

It recommended that an action plan or mechanism may be worked out at the earliest for effective sharing of resources, capacity enhancement and pooling of available expertise of the central agencies as well as coordinated global efforts to root out terrorist networks in the "neighbouring countries".The committee said India should play a prominent role in evolving measures in collaboration with the international community to prevent the spread of radicalisation and extremist ideology.It said the government should work in close coordination with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and other bodies to bring about qualitative improvement in the regulatory capacity so that terror entities do not get new opportunities for financing terrorism.The committee said effective implementation of the UN Security Council's sanctions regime can be a major tool in countering the activities of terrorists and terrorist groups by restricting their travel and suppressing their funding avenues.

The committee said an evidence-based listing and delisting mechanism with greater transparency would be effective in combating terrorism *—Salar News*

QUESTION HOUR DRAMA

RS sees uproar over skipping of question

Parliamentarians in Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Opposition members created a noisy scene in the Rajya Sabha when question related to aviation was skipped inadvertently by Deputy Chairman Harivansh on Monday.

Jaya Bachchan, Deepender Singh Hooda and other opposition members sought to know the reasons for skipping question number 18 and taking up question number 19 related to Polavaram irrigation project.

- Question 18 was about "funds allotted to Maharashtra under various schemes of the Ministry of Civil Aviation during the period 2021-2024

Question 18 was about "funds allotted to Maharashtra under various schemes of the Ministry of Civil Aviation during the period 2021-2024", while Question 19 was on "damage of diaphragm wall of the Polavaram Irrigation Project in Andhra Pradesh".

The deputy chairman said it happened inadvertently but the opposition members were not convinced.

When Samajwadi Party member Jaya Bachchan rose to speak, the chairman said, "You are a senior member and even otherwise in the country whatever you say is looked up to and regarded. So, you will cheer for all of us. I am sure a great actor like you must have taken many retakes also."

"Treat us with respect," she urged and added if the chair had told us a question cannot be taken due to certain problems, members would have understood as they are not schoolchildren.

Dhankhar replied, "no one will disagree with this sentiment" and asked members of both ruling and treasury benches to follow good manners and direct their concerns through the chair and not inter-se. *—PTI*

BILL INTRODUCED IN LS OVER EXAM MALPRACTICE

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Centre introduced a bill in Lok Sabha to check malpractices in government recruitment exams on Monday.

Any malpractices such as paper leaks and fake websites will face strict penalties including a minimum jail term of three years and a fine up to Rs 1 crore.

The Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024, introduced by Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh, mentions "leakage of question paper or answer key", "directly or indirectly assisting the candidate in any manner unauthorisedly in the public examination" and "tampering with the computer network or a computer resource or a computer system" as offences done by a person, group of persons or institutions.The objective of the bill is to bring greater transparency, fairness and credibility to the public examination systems and to reassure the youth that their sincere and genuine efforts will be fairly rewarded and their future is safe, it said.No person or or institutions shall collude or conspire to facilitate indulgence in any such unfair means, the proposed law says. *—PTI*

Govt seeks Parl nod for ₹78K cr spending

New Delhi, 5 Feb

Government sought Parliament's nod for a net additional spending of Rs 78,673 crore in the current financial year, including Rs 10,798 crore expenditure towards MGNREGA. The second batch of supplementary demands for grants for 2023-24 was tabled in Parliament by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman provides for additional spending of Rs 9,231 crore and Rs 3,000 crore towards food and fertiliser subsidy. —PTI

FM proposes ₹1.18L cr interim budget for J&K

New Delhi, 5 Feb

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday proposed an interim Budget of Rs 1.18 lakh crore for fiscal 2024-25 for the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir. The interim Budget envisages a fiscal deficit of Rs 20,760 crore and a 7.5 per cent growth in gross state domestic product (GSDP). Capital expenditure for the fiscal has been proposed at Rs 38,566 crore, which is 14.64 per cent of the GSDP. —PTI

Abolish 1991 Places of Worship Act: BJP MP

New Delhi, 5 Feb

BJP MP Harnath Singh Yadav demanded the immediate abolition of the Places of Worship Act, 1991. The law impinges on the religious rights of Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists provided under the Constitution.His demand comes in the backdrop of the ongoing legal tussle involving the Gyanvapi mosque complex in Varanasi and the Krishna Janmabhoomi-Shahi Eidgah suit in Mathura. —PTI

INDIA BLOC WILL REMOVE 50% CAP ON RESERVATION: RAGA

RANCHI, 5 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday promised a nationwide caste census and removal of the 50 per cent cap on reservation if the INDIA bloc forms the government at the Centre after the Lok Sabha polls.

Gandhi also launched a scathing attack on Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying when the demand for caste census was raised and the time came to give rights to OBCs, Dalits and tribals, the Prime Minsiter stated there are no castes, but when it is time to get votes, he says he is an OBC.

He also alleged that the BJP tried to topple the JMM-Congress-RJD government in Jharkhand as the chief minister was a tribal.

Gandhi claimed that Dalits, tribals, and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) were made bonded labourers and their participation was lacking in big companies, hospitals, schools, colleges and courts. "This is the biggest question before India. Our first step would be to get a caste census in the country," the former Congress chief said. *—PTI*

Now, states &UTs can ban SIMI under UAPA

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Centre on Monday gave powers to all states and Union Territories to declare the terrorist group Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) a banned organisation under the anti-terror law UAPA.

On 29 January, the Central government had extended the ban imposed on the SIMI for five more years.

While extending the ban on the terrorist organisation, the government had said the group has been involved in fomenting terrorism and disturbing peace and communal harmony in the country.

In a notification on Monday, the Union Home Ministry said in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 42 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (37 of 1967), the Central government directs that all powers exercisable by it under section 7 and section 8 of the said Act shall also be exercised by the state governments and the Union Territory administrations in relation to the unlawful association SIMI.

As many as 10 state governments -- Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh -- have recommended for declaration of SIMI as an "unlawful association" under the provisions of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). . *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Islamic preacher detained; cops lathicharge mob

MUMBAI, 4 FEB

Gujarat Police probing a hate speech case on Sunday detained Islamic preacher Mufti Salman Azhari in Mumbai and left with him in the evening, an official said.Police resorted to mild lathicharge as hundreds of supporters of the Mufti gathered outside Ghatkopar police station demanding his immediate release, bringing traffic to a standstill in the area, the official said.The Gujarat Police team has left with Azhari, the official added. Junagadh Police arrested two people on Saturday after a video of an inflammatory speech allegedly delivered by the preacher went viral on social media, a Gujarat Police officer has said.The speech was delivered at an event held near police station in Junagadh, he said.*—PTI*

SC to hear Bihar Caste survey plea on 16 April

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday fixed 16 April for a final hearing on a batch of pleas challenging the Patna High Court order upholding the Bihar government's decision to conduct a caste survey.A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta said that the matter required a detailed hearing.Justice Khanna said all the intervention applications filed on the issue will also be taken on 16 April when the final hearing will take place. On 2 January, the top court had asked the Bihar government to put in public domain the break-up of the caste survey data to enable those aggrieved to challenge the findings. *—PTI*

2 held for murder of 77-year-old Punjab businessman in Goa

PANAJI, 5 FEB

Two people have been arrested for allegedly robbing and killing a 77-year-old businessman in North Goa, on Monday.The victim, Narottam Singh Dhillon alias Nims Dhillon, was found dead in his villa in Pilerne-Marra village on Sunday morning, an official said.Following a probe, the Porvorim police arrested the accused, Jitendra Ramachandra Sahu, 32 and Nitu Shankar Rahuja ,22, from Navi Mumbai, Deputy Superintendent of Police Vishwesh Karpe said. According to the police, the victim, who hailed from Punjab, had been living in Goa since 2015. Investigations revealed that the accused had visited the victim on Saturday night and had allegedly killed him robbed him of gold, his mobile phone and a rented car. The Navi Mumbai police were informed about the duo's movements and detained them, and a police team took their custody.*—PTI*

Six of family killed in road accident in Kanpur

KANPUR, 5 FEB

Six people of a family were killed after their car went out of control and fell into a drain on Monday. The incident happened near Jagannathpur village in Kanpur Dehat district when the family was returning from Madhya Pradesh after attending a tilak ceremony. Virat, 15, and Vaishnavi, 19, who were among the eight people travelling in the ill-fated vehicle, were saved from the accident, said Superintendent of Police, Kanpur Dehat, BBGTS Murthy. Those killed have been identified as Vikas ,40, his elder brother Sanju,45, Khushbu,17, Golu ,16, Prachi, 12, and Prateek,10. They were taken to Sikandra Community Health Centre where they were declared dead. *—PTI*

EC asks parties not to use minors in polls campaigns

District election officers must ensure compliance over the order

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Ahead of Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission on Monday asked political parties not to use children in campaigning "in any form whatsoever", including for distribution of posters and pamphlets or sloganeering.

In an advisory sent to parties, the poll panel conveyed its "zero tolerance" towards use of children in any manner during the electoral process by parties and candidates.

Separately, the commission has also directed all election officials and poll machinery to refrain from involving children in any capacity during election-related work or activities.

District election officers and returning officers will "bear personal responsibility" to ensure compliance with all relevant acts and laws pertaining to child labour.

"Any violation of these provisions by election machinery under their jurisdiction will result in severe disciplinary action," it warned.

Political leaders and candidates should not use children for campaign activities in any manner, including for holding a child in their arms, carrying a child in a vehicle or in rallies, the poll watchdog said.

In an advisory sent to parties, the poll panel conveyed its "zero tolerance" towards use of children in any manner during the electoral process *PHOTO: PTI*

- These measures include the establishment of an online portal to facilitate transparent financial disclosures by political parties for timely submission of statutory reports

"This prohibition extends to the use of children to create the semblance of a political campaign in any manner including use through poem, songs, spoken words, display of insignia of political party or candidate...," EC said in a statement.

However, the mere presence of a child accompanied by their parent or guardian in proximity of a political leader who is not involved in any election campaigning activity by the political party, will not be construed as a violation of the guidelines, it noted.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar has consistently emphasised the pivotal role of political parties as the EC's key stakeholders, urging them to become active partners in upholding democratic values, especially in view of forthcoming parliamentary polls.

The advisory on children came days after its earlier advisory to political parties to maintain respectful discourse towards persons with disabilities (PwDs).

EC also reminded parties and candidates of the relevant laws dealing with child labour and asked them to ensure strict compliance.

It noted that in 2014, the Bombay High Court had also stressed the need to ensure that political parties do not allow participation of minor children in any election-related activities.

Since Rajiv Kumar took over as the CEC, the poll panel has been actively implementing directives aimed at streamlining various activities of political parties.

These measures include the establishment of an online portal to facilitate transparent financial disclosures by political parties for timely submission of statutory reports and to facilitate vigil on misuse of enabling statutory provisions.

Additionally, the EC has undertaken initiatives to identify and delist fraudulent Registered Unrecognized Political Parties (RUPPs).

—PTI

AFTER POOJA VERDICT

Plea seeks survey of Gyanvapi's other basements

VARANASI, 5 FEB

Days after the district court ruled that a priest can perform prayers in a cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque here, a petitioner on Monday filled a plea seeking an ASI survey of all other closed basements in the complex.

The Varanasi district court will hear the petition on Tuesday.

The petitioner Rakhi Singh is a founding member of the Vishwa Vedic Sanatan Sangh and is one of the parties in the Maa Shringar Gauri case, which led to the survey of the complex by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

In the petition, she asked for all closed cellars in the Gyanvapi mosque complex, adjacent to the Kashi Vishwanath temple, to be surveyed by the ASI, her advocate Anupam Dwivedi said.

He said a map of the closed basements has also been included in the petition.The petition said there are "secret cellars" inside the basements, and it is necessary to survey them also so that the "entire truth" of the Gyanvapi mosque is revealed.

Following an earlier petition by five women devotees, the court had ordered the ASI to conduct a survey of the Gyanvapi mosque complex, barring the "wazukhana" used for ritual ablutions before namaz.

The southern cellar of the Gyanvapi mosque was opened last week and a priest performed prayers.

The court had allowed regular prayers in the cellar on the petition by Shailendra Kumar Pathak, who claimed that his maternal grandfather, priest Somnath Vyas, used to perform prayers there till December 1993. According to Pathak's counsel, the access to the cellar was closed for the priest during Mulayam Singh Yadav's term as Uttar Pradesh chief minister.

The prayers at the cellar are being performed by a priest nominated by the Kashi Vishwanath temple trust. Devotees to the temple have also begun going past the opening in the barricade, created after the court order, to have a glimpse of the cellar. *—PTI*

'Marriage dissolution does not efface status of child's parents'

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Dissolution of a marriage does not efface the parental status of the mother and father of a child, the Delhi High Court has observed while allowing a man's plea to have his name reflected in the school records of his minor son.

The High Court said when the man was alive, there was no justification for his ex-wife to remove the father's name in the school admission form of their son and replace it with the name of her second husband.

It said while the woman has every right to have her name reflected in the school records as the mother of the minor, that cannot authorise her to refuse the man's right to have his name also entered in the documents as the child's father.

- High Court said when the man was alive, there was no justification for his ex-wife to remove the father's name in the school admission form of their son and replace it her second husband

"The dissolution of a marriage does not efface the parental status of the mother and father of the child borne out of the said marriage," Justice C Hari Shankar said.

"In these circumstances, this court deems it appropriate, while allowing the prayer of the petitioner to have his name reflected in the record of (school) as the father of (child), to direct the school to reflect, alongside, the name of (woman) as his mother. The school is directed to take necessary corrective steps within a period of two weeks," it said.

The grievance of the petitioner was that his name was not reflecting in the school records where his son has been studying since 2016 and instead the name of the woman's second husband was appearing as the guardian of the child. *—PTI*

SEEDS OF HOPE

Farmers plant paddy saplings, in Nadia district, on Monday *PHOTO: PTI*

SC stays ex-IPS' term in Dhoni's plea case

NEW DEHLI, 5 FEB

Supreme Court granted an interim stay to retired IPS officer G Sampath Kumar in a contempt of court case filed by former team India cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Monday

A bench of Justices AS Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan issued notice on Kumar's plea against the high court order. The matter has been posted for next hearing on 8 March.

High court on 15 December 2023, had found Kumar guilty of committing criminal contempt and sentenced him to 15-day simple imprisonment. Dhoni had moved the court in 2014 against the former cop for having named the popular cricketer in the Indian Premier League (IPL) betting scam.In the petition, Dhoni sought to punish Kumar for the remarks made by him against the judiciary in his written statement filed in response to a Rs 100 crore defamation suit.High court said, Kumar has consciously made an attempt to scandalise and to lower the authority of both Hight court and Supreme Court. *—PTI*

COP SUSPENDED OVER INACTION IN PUNE VARSITY

PUNE, 5 FEB

A police sub-inspector has been suspended after he allegedly failed to act when members of the BJYM and ABVP threw ink and damaged a notice board. The incident took place at the Lalit Kala Kendra on the Savitribai Phule Pune University premise. Policeman was deployed on the university campus in Maharashtra, in the wake of a scuffle between the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) activists and students of the Lalit Kala Kendra over a play.On a complaint by the RSS-affiliated ABVP, a professor and five students were arrested. *—PTI*

More snow in HP, 645 roads blocked

SHIMLA, 5 FEB

Snowfall and rains continued across Himachal Pradesh, affecting normal life as 645 roads, including four national highways, were closed for vehicles on Monday, the state emergency operation centre said.

In the state capital Shimla, 242 roads have been closed, 157 in Lahaul and Spiti, 93 in Kullu, 61 in Chamba and 51 in Mandi district, it said.

According to the centre, 1,416 transformers and 52 water supply schemes have been disrupted in Himachal Pradesh.

In the past 24 hours, Chirgaon received 35 cm of snow, Khadrala 30 cm, Manali 23.6 cm, Narkanda 20 cm, Gondla 16.5cm, Keylong 15.2cm, Shilaroo 15cm, Sangla 8.2cm, Kukumseri 7.1cm Kalpa 7cm and Shimla 2cm, the local MeT office said.

Tourists play with snow after fresh snowfall, in Manali, on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

There was no significant change in the minimum temperatures, however, maximum temperatures were marked below normal following an appreciable dip, the weather office said.

Lahaul and Spiti's Kukumseri was coldest at night with a minimum temperature of minus 6.8 degrees C while Dehra Gopipur in Kangra was hottest during the day at 14 degrees C.The local MeT office has predicted dry weather in the state for the next six days. *—PTI*

SC NOTICE TO CENTRE OVER 75% PVT JOBS QUOTA IN HARYANA

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Supreme Court on Monday sought response from the Centre on a plea filed by the Haryana government against the Punjab and Haryana High Court order declaring as "unconstitutional" its law providing 75 per cent reservation in private sector jobs to the residents of the state.

A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Aravind Kumar issued notice to the Union of India and the Faridabad Industries Association on the appeal filed by the Haryana government.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Haryana government, submitted that the high court verdict was devoid of reasoning.The Haryana government has moved the top court against the high court order of 17 November, 2023.

The high court had also held the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 "ultra-vires" and said it will become "ineffective from the date it came into force".

In its 83-page judgement, the high court had said, "We are of the considered opinion that the writ petitions are liable to be allowed and the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 is held to be unconstitutional and violative of Part III of the Constitution of India and is accordingly held ultravires and the same is ineffective from the date it came into force."High Court had admitted multiple petitions against the act that came into effect from 15 January, 2022 and provided 75 per cent reservation in jobs in the private sector. *—PTI*

HC junks plea to abort 28-wk foetus

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Delhi High Court refused to allow a 20-year-old unmarried woman to terminate her 28-week pregnancy, on Monday.

The court had reserved its verdict on the petition last week while orally observing that it would not allow the woman to abort a "completely viable foetus".

"I am not going to allow it for a completely viable foetus of 28 weeks. In the report, I can't see any abnormality in the foetus. Foeticide cannot be permitted," said a bench of Justice Subramonium Prasad.

Advocate Amit Mishra, representing the woman, had said she did not come to know about the pregnancy earlier and it was only on 25 January, that she came to know that she was 27 weeks pregnant.

After the doctors refused to terminate the pregnancy as the gestation period was beyond the legally permissible limit of 24 weeks, the woman sought permission from the high court to undergo medical termination of her 28-week pregnancy under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy (MTP) Act.

The lawyer said the young woman was unmarried and no one in her family knows about her pregnancy and her condition shall be considered.He had urged the court to direct the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences to medically examine the woman. *—PTI*

BOMBAY HC SAYS

Parents return kid over habits, HC annuls adoption

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Bombay High Court has annulled the adoption of a minor boy after his adoptive parents said they have not bonded with the child.

A single bench of Justice RI Chagla passed the order last month while hearing a petition filed by the Bal Asha Trust in December 2023, after the adoptive parents complained to the trust about the "uncontrollable bad behaviour and habits" of the child.

The HC said it would be in the interest of the child if the adoption order, passed on 17 August, 2023, is annulled.

High Court also directed the Central Adoption Resource Authority (CARA) to re-register the child as 'free for adoption' for identifying suitable prospective adoptive parents at the earliest.The trust had advised the adoptive parents to undergo counselling sessions in order to understand the child's behavioural issues better and try remedial measures to address those alleged concerns.The authorities concerned - CARA, State Adoption Resource Authority, District Child Protection Unit, and Specialised Adoption Agency - were also informed about the adoptive parents' inability to keep and take care of the child.The adoptive parents attended two counselling sessions as advised by the trust.

The HC said it would be in the interest of the child if the adoption order, passed on 17 August, 2023, is annulled *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The counsellor found the adoptive parents do not have an emotional bonding with the child, though he is fond of the adoptive parents and their seven-year-old biological daughter, who is an elder sibling, the petition said.The adoptive parents submitted an affidavit before the court stating that, "We have not bonded with the child, hence we would like to return the child."The HC bench, besides ordering the annulment of the adoption order, directed that an investment of Rs 2 lakh made in the child's name for his benefit by the adoptive parents shall be returned to them.The adoptive parents are directed to return to the petitioner-institution all the original reports and documents pertaining to the child immediately, the court said . *—PTI*

LOK SABHA POLLS 2024

K'taka, T'gana victory to benefit Cong, says Khan

Zuha Fathima Junaidi

Noted educationist and politician Mansoor Ali Khan, who is also the AICC Secretary incharge of Telangana state delves into the Congress party's winning strategy for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections drawing parallels from the party's recent triumph in Karnataka and Telangana. In an interview with Salar News, Khan unveils the party's roadmap, highlighting the party's guarantees and voter-centric initiatives aimed at resonating with diverse demographics across the nation.

Mansoor Ali Khan PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Q:What, in your opinion, led to the Congress party wresting Telangana from the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) in the recent Assembly polls?

A:The victory in Telangana was a result of several factors. When the state of Telangana was formed, our party leader Sonia Gandhi and the Congress party fulfilled a long standing demand of the people of Telangana of granting them statehood. Unfortunately, BRS took the credit for it. Subsequently they formed the government. Firstly, there was a significant anti-incumbency sentiment against the ruling party where only a single family was in power for nine years. BRS's Chief Minister was not accessible to the public. They utterly failed to fulfill its manifesto promises and were criticized for its dynastic-feudalistic approach to governance. Additionally, allegations of corruption in every segment and pro-corporate policies further alienated their supporters. We are not opposed to the development of Telangana, but you should develop both the corporate sector and the rural economy. Their rule only saw the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer. They were a classic example of total failure of governance. Moreover, BRS, BJP and All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) were looked at together as opposition to Congress.

Q: How did the Congress party reach out to first-time voters in Telangana, and what promises were made to attract their support?

A: The rate of unemployment in BRS Govt was huge and the youth were very dejected. The Congress focused on addressing their concerns cutting across caste, class and religion by guaranteeing scholarships in education, creating more job opportunities, and offering social security measures. The goodwill of Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi and our National President, Mallikarjun M Kharge, resonated deeply with the voters in Telangana, contributing significantly to our party's success in the state. Their genuine connection with the people, coupled with the dynamic leadership of PCC President A Revanth Reddy, created a strong appeal among voters, particularly the youth.

- **With the momentum from recent victories, what is the Congress party's vision for shaping the National political landscape?**
- Victory in Karnataka had a positive effect on Telangana, now the victory in Telangana will certainly have a positive effect on states and Lok Sabha elec tions. We will fare well in Maharashtra, West Bengal and win in Bihar, even without the support of Nitish Kumar. Now, the choice for our country and its citi zens is crystal clear. Do we desire a government that thrives on deception, dismantles institutions, manipu lates the media, and caters solely to the interests of a select few capitalists? Or do we aspire for a Government that truly represents the people, gov erned by the people, and works tirelessly for the wel fare of every citizen?

> **Congress did get overwhelming support from minorities but has also received a large chunk of votes from the majority. Unlike certain parties that seek to divide, we aim to unite the country and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all.**
>
> -Mansoor Ali Khan,AICC Secretary incharge of Telangana

Q: How does the Congress plan to replicate and expand upon the support it has received from specific demographic groups, especially minorities in Karnataka and Telangana?

A: For a country to prosper, it is important to see how the minorities are being treated. Today, BJP has made the minorities feel like second class citizens of the country. BJP leaders openly abuse minorities and give statements against them in public forums, without any action taken against them. Their agenda is to alienate the minorities and deliberately work against the spirit of the Constitution. They are not thinking in the larger interests of the Country. Even AIMIM works mainly on rowdyism, they create fear among the people.

Yes, Congress did get overwhelming support from minorities but has also received a large chunk of votes from the majority. Unlike certain parties that seek to divide, we aim to unite the country and ensure equal rights and opportunities for all.

Q. With the digital communication platforms taking center stage in elections, how does your party plan to leverage these channels to engage voters and counter opposition narratives during the campaign?

A: When it comes to digital platforms, particularly social media, we've observed a significant shift. Unlike traditional TV news channels these days, which often seem to serve the government's agenda and focus on bashing the opposition, social media platforms tend to offer a more balanced and neutral space. People are increasingly recognizing this disparity and are turning away from mainstream channels that propagate hate. BJP has mastered the art of manipulating digital platforms, particularly WhatsApp. This has led to widespread misinformation and polarization, creating significant challenges for a fair electoral process.

In comparison to previous elections, our presence and outreach on these platforms have improved considerably. We're striving to deliver our message effectively without resorting to fake news or sensationalism. We prioritize the welfare of the nation over political gains. We're committed to using digital platforms responsibly and ethically to connect with voters.

Q: What was the sentiment of subaltern groups in Telangana?

A: In Telangana, though the BRS government failed to fulfill their promises, the sentiment of Telangana took them to a second term. But they underestimated the dissatisfaction on the ground level, especially among subaltern groups. There was a big disconnect between the Government and the people. The people could not approach the ministers as they were drunk on power.

Q: Drawing from the Assembly polls in Karnataka and Telangana, where party's guarantees played a significant role, how does the Congress plan to use this strategy in the upcoming Lok Sabha elections?

A: What do we as citizens want? A basic cost of living, social security and good governance. The guarantees announced in both states were for people from all sections of society. Currently Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra is to assure all the citizens that we will not discriminate and spread hatred, we are committed to uniting the country. Congress is offering concrete guarantees at the national level, addressing issues such as social security, economic development, and social justice. Our manifesto, under the Chairmanship of P Chidambaram, is currently being developed through extensive public feedback sessions, and will reflect the aspirations and needs of the people across the country.

Q: Balancing national issues with state-specific concerns is crucial in a diverse country like India. How does the Congress plan to address this balance?

A: Slowly but surely the BJP is undermining the federal structure of our country. Non-BJP governed states are facing unequal treatment and neglect from the Central government. We recognize the federal structure of India and the importance of addressing both national and state-level issues. Our approach involves dialogue and consensus-building with state governments, regardless of political differences, to ensure effective governance and equitable development across the countr

—Salar News

SALAR سالار

Fake cancer death of actress sparks ethics debate

Social media post claiming that actress Poonam Pandey had died due to cervical cancer and a subsequent video announcing that she was alive has sparked a furious debate on the ethical conundrums surrounding online publicity campaigns.

On Friday, Poonam Pandey's official Instagram account released a statement saying that the 32-year-old actress had "bravely fought the disease" and died.

Many trusted the post; news outlets reported the news of her death within minutes and social media was full of tributes for the actress.

Pandey has acted in a few films but she became an online sensation due to her controversial posts and publicity campaigns. In 2011, the actress promised to strip naked if the Indian cricket team won the World Cup, though she didn't stick to it.

Just a day after her "death", Pandey posted a video saying that she had "faked her demise" and that the Instagram post for her 1.3 million followers was part of a social media campaign to create awareness about cervical cancer.

"Suddenly we all are talking about cervical cancer, aren't we?" Ms Pandey says in the video, adding that she was "proud" about what the news of her death "was able to achieve".

Cervical cancer is often called a "silent killer" because it shows no noticeable symptoms in its early stages. After breast cancer, it is the second-most common cancer in women in India, with over 77,000 dying from the disease every year.

But it is also one of the most preventable cancers, as the HPV (human papilloma virus) vaccine protects against high-risk cancer-causing strains of the virus. But women are advised to continue regular cervical cancer screenings as the vaccine doesn't protect against all cancer-causing HPV strains.

- The timing of Pandey's post led many social media users to speculate that it was part of the government's strategy to publicise the HPV vaccine but neither the government nor Pandey have drawn a link between the two. It in a way it led attention to a serious issue like cervical cancer

The timing of Pandey's post led many social media users to speculate that it was part of the government's strategy to publicise the HPV vaccine but neither the government nor Pandey have drawn a link between the two.

Over the weekend, her post and video generated a debate around the method used to draw attention to a serious issue like cervical cancer.

While a few people praised the social media campaign for "shocking" people enough to make them care about the disease, many criticised it for being insensitive towards those battling cancer or people had lost family members to the disease.

"Death is not a joke," one user wrote on X,while another, who had lost his father to cancer when he was a child, said that he found the campaign distressing as it brought back difficult memories.

Some also criticised the media for reporting on Pandey's death without verifying the news.

"Poonam Pandey's death was followed by the death of the Indian media. No verifications, no fact checks... None of it mattered. She has come back to life today. Can't say the same about our journalism," wrote one user on X.

However, some journalists defended their decision by saying that it had been shared by the actor's "official Instagram account".

On Saturday, Schbang - the social media agency responsible for creating the campaign - apologised to those who were "triggered" by the campaign.

"Our actions were driven by a singular mission - to elevate awareness about cervical cancer," the agency said in a statement while also sharing statics related to the prevalence of the disease in India.

It also said that Pandey's mother had battled cancer and that she "understands the importance of prevention and the criticality of awareness, especially when there's a vaccine available".

But the backlash over the campaign hasn't died down yet.

It has made people question whether it's all right for effectiveness to trump ethics when it comes to creating "viral" campaigns such as this one. Some have also asked that who's responsible for setting these standards - is it advertisers, the media or viewers?

—BBC News

Over the weekend, Poonam Pandey's post and video generated a debate around the method used to draw attention to a serious issue like cervical cancer PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Facebook at 20: Four ways the app changed the world

Since the launch of Facebook 20 years ago, the world's most popular social network has been redesigned dozens of times.

But its aim has remained the same: to connect people online. And make mountains of money from advertising.

As the platform turns 20, here are four ways Facebook has changed the world.

1. Facebook changed the social media game

Other social networks, such as MySpace, existed before Facebook - but Mark Zuckerberg's site instantly took off when it launched in 2004, proving just how rapidly an online site of this kind could take hold.

In less than a year it had one million users, and within four years it had overtaken MySpace - fuelled by innovations such as the ability to "tag" people in photos.

Taking a digital camera on a night out, then tagging your friends in dozens of pictures was a staple of teenage life in the late noughties. The constantly changing activity feed was also a big draw for early users.

By 2012, Facebook had surpassed one billion users a month and, aside from a brief blip at the end of 2021 - when daily active users dropped for the first time - the platform has continued to grow.

By expanding into less connected countries and offering free internet, the company has maintained and increased the number of Facebook users. At the end of 2023, Facebook reported it had 2.11 billion daily users.

Admittedly, Facebook is less popular than it used to be with young people. Nonetheless, it remains the most popular social network in the world, and has ushered in a new era of social activity online.

2. Facebook made our personal data valuable... and less personal

These days, Facebook's parent company Meta is an advertising giant which, alongside the likes of Google, takes the lion's share of global advertising money.

On Thursday Meta reported more than USD 40 billion in revenue for the last quarter of 2023, chiefly from offering advertisers highly targeted ad services. But Facebook has also shown where data collection can go awry.

Facebook is less popular than it used to be with young people. Nonetheless, it remains the most popular social network in the world, and has ushered in a new era of social activity online PHOTO: NIALL KENNEDY/BBC

Meta has been fined multiple times for mishandling personal data.

The most publicised case was the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2014, which led to Facebook paying USD 725 million to settle legal action due to a significant data breach.

Last year, the company was issued with a record USD 1.2 billion fine by the Irish Data Protection Commission, for transferring European users' data outside of the jurisdiction. Facebook is currently appealing against the fine.

3. Facebook made the internet political

By offering targeted advertising, Facebook has become a major platform for election campaigning around the world.

For example, in the five months leading up to the US Presidential election of 2020, incumbent President Donald Trump's team spent more than $40m on Facebook adverts, according to Statista research.

Facebook has had a hand in changing grassroots politics too - by enabling disparate groups of users to gather, campaign and plan action on a global scale.

Facebook and Twitter were said to be crucial during the Arab Spring in helping to co-ordinate protests and spread the news about what was happening on the ground.

But the adoption of Facebook for political ends has been criticised for some of its consequences, including its impact on human rights. In 2018, Facebook agreed with a UN report that said it had failed to prevent people using the platform to "incite offline violence" against Rohingya people in Myanmar.

4. Facebook kick-started Meta's dominance

With the huge success of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg built a social network and technology empire that remains unprecedented in terms of users and its consequent power.

Up-and-coming companies, including WhatsApp, Instagram and Oculus, were all purchased and turbo-charged under the umbrella company Facebook, which changed its name to Meta in 2021.

Meta now says more than three billion people use at least one of its products every day.Facebook and Instagram's disappearing Stories feature is similar to a key feature found on Snapchat; Instagram Reels is the company's answer to the challenge posed by video-sharing app TikTok; and Threads is Meta's attempt to imitate X.

Tactics have become more important than ever, thanks to the increased competition and a more strict regulatory environment.

In 2022, Meta was forced to sell GIF-maker Giphy at a loss after UK regulators blocked it from owning the service due to fears of over-dominance in the market.

The next 20 years?

Facebook's rise and continued dominance is testament to Mark Zuckerberg's ability to keep the site relevant.Naysayers will hesitate now before asking when its time might finally be up.But the reality is maintaining its crown as the most popular social network will be a monumental challenge over the next 20 years.

That's not just because the industry, as always, is changing at breakneck speed - but because Meta itself is now pushing heavily towards building its business around the idea of the Metaverse.Artificial intelligence is also a big priority for Meta.The company is therefore, to some extent, moving on from Facebook. Whether the world is, given its enduring popularity, is another matter.

—BBC News

Grammys: Taylor Swift makes history with best album

NEW YORK, 5 FEB

Taylor Swift stole the show at this year's Grammy Awards, becoming the first performer to win the prize for album of the year four times. The superstar had previously been tied on three best album wins with Stevie Wonder, Paul Simon and Frank Sinatra.

She received the prize from Celine Dion, who made an unexpected appearance amid health fears. Swift also used the event to reveal a surprise new album.

Miley Cyrus and Billie Eilish took the other top awards at Sunday's ceremony.

The Los Angeles show was dominated by women, with R&B stars SZA and Victoria Monét and all-female indie supergroup Boygenius picking up multiple awards, and music icons Tracy Chapman and Joni Mitchell giving rare and poignant performances. Jay-Z used his winner's speech to address the fact his his wife Beyonce has never won the top prize.

Killer Mike was the top male winner, taking three rap trophies. But his success was overshadowed by an apparent altercation backstage, which led to him being "booked for misdemeanor battery", LA police said.

Dion got a rapturous reception when she emerged to present the best album trophy, almost a year after she was forced to cancel all of her live shows after being diagnosed with a rare neurological disorder.

"When I say that I'm happy to be here, I really mean it from my heart," she told the audience. There was an equally enthusiastic response when Dion announced Swift's name as the winner of best album. Midnights also won best pop vocal album - but Swift has curiously still never received the prizes for song or record of the year.

Grammy Awards

- **Song of the year**- Billie Eilish, What Was I Made For?
- **Best new artist** - Victoria Monét
- **Best Music urbana album**- Karol G, Mañana Será Bonito
- **Best country album**- Lainey Wilson, Bell Bottom Country
- **Record of the year**- Flowers, Miley Cyrus

Eilish's contribution to the Barbie film soundtrack, What Was I Made For?, beat Swift's Anti-Hero to the song of the year title this time. *—BBC News*

The Los Angeles show was dominated by women, with R&B stars SZA and Victoria Monét

PHOTO: X/ OSCAR/AP

PHOTO: X

Sri Lanka signs a free trade pact with Thailand

COLOMBO, 3 FEB

Debt-stricken Sri Lanka signed a trade pact with Thailand on Saturday in a bid to boost trade and investment as the Indian ocean island nation is struggling to recover from its worst economic crisis that hit two year ago. The Sri Lanka Thailand Free Trade Agreement covering trade in goods, investment, custom procedures and intellectual property rights was signed in the capital Colombo in the presence of Sri Lanka President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin. Sri Lanka began talks with Thailand on a free trade agreement in 2016. The countries' two-way trade was worth about USD 352 million in 2022, with Thailand's exports at USD 292 million and Sri Lanka's exports at USD 58 million, according to Sri Lankan government's data. *—AP*

China can monitor govt-funded projects 24/7

BEIJING, 5 FEB

Some Chinese developers must now install monitoring equipment at their projects, under official measures which took affect this month. The rules apply to firms that have received at least 30 million yuan ($4.2m; £3.3m) of government funding. It comes as authorities move to support China's crisis-hit property industry. In January, the country's housing ministry said it would offer more bailout loans to developers struggling with debt and a slowdown in demand. Announcing the new surveillance rules in January, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) said in a statement that it was moving to "regulate the implementation of projects and the use of funding". "These measures are important to strengthen investment supervision... and improve the effectiveness of government investment," it added. The rules are part of the Chinese government's efforts to ensure that "funds being used to prop up struggling property developers are being used for their intended purposes," Ben Harburg from investment firm MSA Capital said. *—BBC News*

More China tariffs if re-elected, says Donald Trump

WASHIGNTON, 5 FEB

Former US president Donald Trump has said he would impose more tariffs on Chinese goods if he wins the US presidential election in November. In an interview with Fox News, he said the tariffs could be in excess of 60%. "We have to do it," he said in the interview on Sunday. Trump, currently the front runner for the Republican party, is facing a number of criminal charges including attempting to overturn the 2020 election results. He has denied these. He has long accused China of unfair trading practices and intellectual property theft. *—BBC News*

Boeing flags delays after supplier finds another problem

WASHINGTON, 5 FEB

Boeing reported another problem with fuselages on its 737 jets that might delay deliveries of about 50 aircraft in the latest quality gaffe to plague the manufacturer. Boeing Commercial Airplanes CEO Stan Deal said in a letter to Boeing staff seen Monday that a worker at its supplier discovered misdrilled holes in fuselages. Spirit AeroSystems, based in Wichita, Kansas, makes a large part of the fuselages on Boeing Max jets. "While this potential condition is not an immediate safety issue and all 737s can continue operating safely, we currently believe we will have to perform rework on about 50 undelivered planes," Deal said in the letter to employees shared with the media. *—AP*

Syria: Six Kurdish fighters killed in strike on US base

The attack hit a training ground at al-Omar base in eastern Syria

BEIRUT, 5 FEB

A drone attack on base housing US troops in eastern Syria killed six allied Kurdish fighters late Sunday, in the first significant attack in Syria or Iraq since the US launched retaliatory strikes over the weekend against Iran-backed militias that have been targeting its forces in the region.

The US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said Monday the attack hit a training ground at al-Omar base in Syria's eastern province of Deir el-Zour and accused "Syrian regime-backed mercenaries" of carrying out the attack.

No casualties were reported among US troops.

An umbrella group of Iran-backed Iraqi militias, dubbed the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, released a video claiming responsibility for the attack and showing them launching a drone from an unspecified location.

In late January, a drone attack by the same group killed three US troops and wounded dozens more at a desert base in Jordan. The US military launched dozens of retaliatory strikes targeting Iran-backed militant groups in western Iraq and eastern Syria and also struck the Houthis in Yemen.

The umbrella group has launched dozens of drone attacks on US military bases and troops in Iraq and Syria, and has called for the withdrawal of American soldiers from both countries.

The attack comes as tensions flare across the Middle East amid the Israel-Hamas war, which was sparked by Hamas' rampage in southern Israel on 7 October. Meanwhile, Britain-based opposition war monitor Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said at least seven SDF fighters were killed in the attack on Sunday and at least 18 others wounded, some in critical condition.

It did not say whether any US military personnel were among the casualties. *—AP*

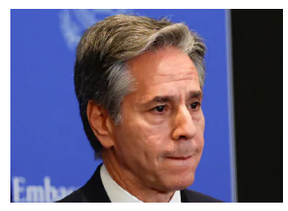
The US-backed, Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces said Monday the attack hit a training ground at al-Omar base in Syria's eastern province of Deir el-Zour

PHOTO: AP

5TH TRIP SINCE OCT

US secy Blinken heads to Middle East

WASHINGTON, 5 FEB



Antony Blinken ***PHOTO: AFP***

- Blinken said that US have helped unlock and get into Gaza Strip and added that there need to be much more of it

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday departed for a four-nation visit to the Middle East as part of continuing diplomatic efforts related to the war between Israel and Hamas, including securing a deal on release of hostages and humanitarian pause for increased delivery of aid to Gaza, The New York Times reported.

Blinken will travel to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, Israel, and the West Bank from 4-8 February. It is his fifth trip to the region since the Hamas' attacks on Israel on 7 October. US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on Sunday said that Israel has a right to respond to the horrific attacks of Hamas. He said that US have helped unlock and get into Gaza Strip and added that there need to be much more of it. He said that making sure more humanitarian aid reaches civilians in Gaza will be a "top priority" for Blinken, who is on his way to the Middle East region.

Speaking on 'Face The News' on CBC News, Sullivan said, "Secretary Blinken is on his way to the region as we speak, and this will be a top priority of his when he sees the Israeli government that the needs of the Palestinian people or something that are going to be front and center in the US approach and that we want to ensure that they are getting access to life saving food, medicine, water, shelter. we'll continue to press until that is done." *—ANI*

China gives suspended death penalty to blogger

BEIJING, 5 FEB

A Chinese court gave a suspended death sentence to a China-born Australian democracy blogger on Monday. The Australian government, which has repeatedly raised his case over the years, said it was appalled.

Yang Hengjun was found guilty of espionage and sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said. Such sentences are often commuted to life in prison after the two years.

"The Australian Government is appalled," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said in a statement. "This is harrowing news for Dr Yang, his family and all who have supported him." Yang, a former Chinese diplomat and state security agent who became a political commentator and writer of spy novels in Australia, was detained on 19 January, 2019, when he arrived in the southern China city of Guangzhou from New York with his wife and teenage stepdaughter.

Yang Hengjun ***PHOTO: AP***

He was tried behind closed doors in May 2021. The details of his case have not been disclosed. Yang, who became an Australian citizen in 2002, has denied working as a spy for Australia or the United States.

Yang said he hadn't experienced direct sunlight in more than four years. He told his family he feared he would die in detention after being diagnosed with a kidney cyst, prompting supporters to demand his release for medical treatment.

Ahead of Albanese's trip to Beijing, Dr Yang's sons wrote to the prime minister to ask for his help in securing their father's release, citing his declining health. *—AP*

I'm thinking about dismissing country's army chief: Zelenskyy

KYIV, 5 FEB

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he was weighing a possible dismissal of the country's top military officer, a prospect that has shocked the nation fighting Russia's invasion and worried Kyiv's Western allies.

Asked whether he was considering the ouster of Gen Valerii Zaluzhnyi, Zelenskyy told Italian RAI TV in an interview released late Sunday that he was thinking about it as part of a broader issue of setting the country's path. He said that "a reset, a new beginning is necessary," and it's "not about a single person but about the direction of the country's leadership."

"I'm thinking about this replacement, but you can't say here we replaced a single person," Zelenskyy said. "When we talk about this, I mean a replacement of a series of state leaders, not just in a single sector like the military. If we want to win we must all push in the same direction, convinced of victory, we cannot be discouraged, let our arms fall, we must have the right positive energy."

Zelenskyy ***PHOTO: AP***

Zelenskyy's comments marked his first confirmation that he was mulling to fire the widely popular general, a possibility that caused an uproar in Ukraine and delighted the Kremlin as the war approaches its second anniversary. According to Ukrainian and Western media reports, Zelenskyy last week offered Zaluzhnyi to resign, but the general refused. Zaluzhnyi hasn't commented on the issue. The tensions have been rising as the country grapples with dire ammunition and personnel shortages following a failed summer counteroffensive. The need for a broad mobilisation to fill the ranks has reportedly been one of the areas of disagreement. *—AP*

AHEAD OF 8 FEB ELECTION

Pakistan EC begins delivery of ballot papers

ISLAMABAD, 5 FEB

With the general election in Pakistan just days away, the delivery of 260 million ballot papers across 859 National Assembly and provincial assembly constituencies has started after taking into account some last-minute candidacy-related petitions, according to a spokesperson of the election commission.

The 8 February elections are taking place for 336 seats in the National Assembly, the lower house of Parliament, along with four provincial assemblies. About 18,000 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.

The printing of the ballot papers was completed at three government presses, with some papers necessitating reprinting following court decisions on candidacy-related petitions, The Express Tribune newspaper reported on Monday, quoting the spokesperson of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP).

This time around, 2,170 tonnes of paper was utilised for the printing process, a substantial increase from 2018. The increased number of ballot papers, totalling 260 million, reflects a 40 million increase from the previous election. "Despite limited time and challenges, the ECP fulfilled its responsibility, by completing the printing of ballot papers on time," the spokesperson said.

The 8 February elections are taking place for 336 seats in the National Assembly

PHOTO: AP

- About 18,000 candidates are in the race for the National Assembly and the four provincial assemblies in Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan

"The process of delivery of ballot papers has started all over the country and it will be completed by Monday," the spokesperson added. To address any complaints relating to the elections, the ECP has also established the Central Control and Monitoring Centre, which has received 221 complaints of various nature, and 198 of them have been addressed, officials said.

The ECP will relay the election results through the Election Management System (EMS). The official said complaints about the EMS were also received from some returning officers (ROs), adding their issues were being resolved.

Meanwhile, caretaker Information Minister Murtaza Solangi has said more than 120 million people are eligible to exercise their right to vote on February 8, according to state-owned broadcaster PTV. Solangi said the caretaker government helped the ECP in every way to pave the way for polls. He said the country would be run by its elected representatives, according to the Constitution. *—PTI*

SPARKING REVOLUTION

Huge atom-smasher bid to find missing 95% of Universe

BERN, 5 FEB

Researchers at the world's biggest particle accelerator in Switzerland have submitted proposals for a new, much larger, supercollider.

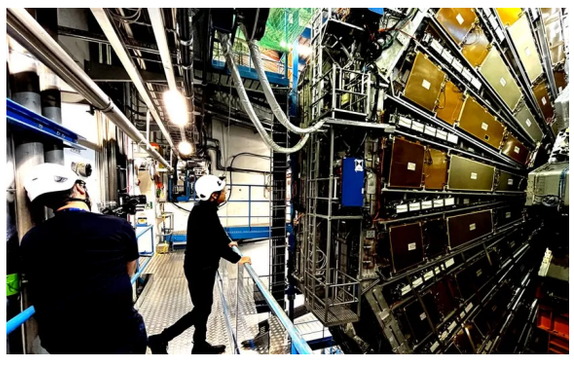
Its aim is to discover new particles that would revolutionise physics and lead to a more complete understanding of how the Universe works. If approved, it will be three times larger than the current giant machine.

But its £12bn price tag has raised some eyebrows, with one critic describing the expenditure as "reckless". That money - which is only the initial construction cost - would come from member nations of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (Cern) including the UK, and some experts have questioned whether it makes economic sense.

The biggest achievement of the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) was the detection of a new particle called the Higgs Boson in 2012.

But since then its ambition to track down two holy grails of physics - dark matter and dark energy - have proved elusive and some researchers believe there are cheaper options.

The new machine is called the Future Circular Collider (FCC). Cern's director general, Prof Fabiola Gianotti, told BBC News that, if approved, it will be a "beautiful machine". *—BBC News*



The biggest achievement of the LHC was the detection of a new particle called the Higgs Boson in 2012 ***PHOTO: BBC NEWS***

10 POLICEMEN KILLED IN PAKISTAN POLICE STATION

PESHAWAR, 5 FEB

At least 10 policemen were killed and six others injured as heavily armed terrorists attacked a police station in northwest Pakistan on Monday, ahead of the 8 February general elections in the country.

The incident took place at Chodwan police station in Daraban tehsil in Dera Ismail Khan district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, a senior police official in Dera Ismail Khan division said.

No outfit has yet claimed responsibility for the attack.

"We lost 10 of our jawans, while six others were injured in the ambush carried out by heavily armed terrorists," District Police Officer Nasir Mehmood said.

The terrorists attacked the police station from all sides with grenades and heavy gunfire. The police also retaliated, but the terrorists managed to escape, police said.

The forces have cordoned off the area and launched a search operation, while the quick response force has reached with additional force, they said. The attack added to the security concerns surrounding the general elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces which have been hit by poll violence and terror strikes in recent days.

Meanwhile, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa caretaker chief minister Arshad Hussain condemned the attack on the police station and expressed condolences to the family members of the victims. *—PTI*

Rupee falls 8 paise to settle at 83.06 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

The rupee depreciated 8 paise to settle at 83.06 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as strengthening American currency overseas and negative sentiment in the domestic equity markets weighed on the local unit.However, the downward trend in the global crude oil prices supported the domestic unit and restricted its decline, forex traders said.At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 83.03 against the dollar and traded in the narrow range of 83.00 to 83.07. The local unit finally settled at 83.06 (provisional) against the greenback, down 8 paise over its previous close.The rupee settled flat at 82.98 against the dollar on Friday.Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.33 per cent higher at 104.12. *—PTI*

Gold declines ₹150; silver plunges ₹ 400

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Gold prices declined Rs 150 to Rs 63,350 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid weak global cues, according to HDFC Securities.In the previous trade, the precious metal had ended at Rs 63,500 per 10 grams.Silver also plunged Rs 400 to Rs 75,500 per kilogram, while it had closed at Rs 75,900 per kg in the previous trade."Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at Rs 63,350 per 10 grams, down by Rs 150, taking bearish cues from the overseas markets," Saumil Gandhi, senior analyst of commodities at HDFC Securities, said.In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,024 per ounce, down by USD 15 from the previous close.Also, silver was trading lower at USD 22.45 per ounce.Gold traded lower as the dollar and yields jumped after a strong US non-farm payrolls data which created some uncertainty about the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy path this year, Navneet Damani, Senior VP of Commodity Research at Motilal Oswal Financial Services, said. *—PTI*

'Focus is on reducing non-essential imports of coal'

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The government has taken several steps to ramp up domestic production of coal and is committed to reducing shipments of all substitutable grade coal, Parliament was informed on Monday.Coal import for blending dropped 44.3 per cent in April-November FY24 over the year-ago period, Coal Minister Pralhad Joshi said in a written reply to Rajya Sabha."The focus of the government is on increasing the domestic production of coal and to eliminate non-essential imports of coal in the country. Most of the requirements of coal in the country are met through indigenous production/supply," he said.The country imported 169.08 MT of coal in April-November FY24. The import was 237.67 MT in FY23, 208.63 MT in FY22 and 215.25 MT in FY21. *—PTI*

Snap-E Cabs raises $2.5 M, to add 300-400 EVs

KOLKATA, 5 FEB

Electric vehicle ride-hailing platform Snap-E Cabs on Monday said it has secured USD 2.5 million in a pre-series A round led by Inflection Point Ventures (IPV).The fresh funds will fuel talent acquisition, technology upgrades, new services and geographical expansion, officials said.It will enable Snap-E Cabs to add 300-400 EVs and expand to two-three new cities by the end of the current fiscal year, they said. Kolkata-based Snap-E Cabs, which was founded in 2022 by Mayank Bindal and Jaydip Mukherjee, aims to operate 1,500-2,000 EVs across five cities by the 2024-25 fiscal.At present, it operates 600 EVs in Kolkata."India's ambitious EV goals can significantly impact global oil markets..." Bindal said.*—PTI*

Markets settle lower on fag-end selling

Nifty falls by 82.10 points or 0.38% to close at 21,771.70

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Benchmark Sensex fell back by 354 points on Monday due to selling in index major Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel and Maruti amid weak trends from Asian and European markets.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined by 354.21 points or 0.49 per cent to settle at 71,731.42 on fag-end selling. During the day, it hit a high of 72,385.93 and a low of 71,602.14.The Nifty fell by 82.10 points or 0.38 per cent to close at 21,771.70. "The Indian market witnessed a sharp fall during the final hours of today's trading.

The robust US job data for January indicates that the expected rate cuts from the Fed in the coming year may be less imminent. After a flat opening, benchmark indices moved in a narrow range before a sharp fall in the final hour. FMCG, telecom, financials and IT shares were on the back while pharma, auto and energy shares advanced.Among the Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel, Maruti, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Titan, Hindustan Unilever, JSW Steel, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries were the major laggards.

- Among the Sensex firms, Bajaj Finance, Bharti Airtel, Maruti, Bajaj Finserv, HCL Technologies, Titan, Hindustan Unilever, JSW Steel, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries were the major laggards

Tata Motors jumped nearly 6 per cent after the company on Friday reported a two-fold jump in net profit at Rs 7,100 crore for the December quarter.

Sun Pharma, Power Grid, Mahindra and Mahindra, Tata Steel, NTPC and Tata Consultancy Services were the other gainers.

"Indications are in favour of consolidation to continue and expect Nifty to respect the 21,450-21,600 zone, in case the profit taking extends," Ajit Mishra, SVP - Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

In Asian markets, Tokyo settled in the green while Seoul, Shanghai and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were quoting marginally lower. The US markets ended in positive territory on Friday.Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.53 per cent to USD 76.92 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 70.69 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.The BSE benchmark climbed 440.33 points or 0.61 per cent to settle at 72,085.63 on Friday. The Nifty went up by 156.35 points or 0.72 per cent to 21,853.80. *—PTI*

No ED probe against company or CEO: Paytm

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The Enforcement Directorate is neither investigating One97 Communications, owner of Paytm brand, nor its Founder and CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma for money regarding inter alia money laundering the company said on Sunday. In September, 2022 the ED had visited premises of the company and some other fintech firms like Razorpay ,for money laundering investigations against some of the merchants that were using their platforms.

"In the past, certain users on our platforms have been subject to enquiries and on those occasions, we have always cooperated with the authorities. We have and continue to abide by Indian laws and take regulatory orders with utmost seriousness," Paytm said in a regulatory filing.

The company is mired into controversy following a recent RBI order that barred Paytm Payments Bank Ltd to not take any further deposits or conduct credit transactions or carry out top-ups on any customers accounts, prepaid instruments, wallets, cards for paying road tolls after February 29.Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) is an associate of One97 Communications Limited (OCL), which holds 49 per cent of the paid-up share capital (directly and through its subsidiary) of PPBL. Sharma has a 51 per cent stake in the bank. *—PTI*

- In September, 2022 ED had visited premises of the company and some other fintech firms like Razorpay ,for money laundering probe against some of the merchants that were using their platforms

Paytm shares fall for 3rd day

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Shares of One97 Communications Ltd, which owns Paytm brand, fell by another 10 per cent to hit its lower circuit limit, as investors continued to dump the stock following the RBI's crackdown.The stock tanked 10 per cent to Rs 438.35 -- its lowest trading permissible limit for the day -- on the BSE. It plummeted 9.99 per cent to hit its lower circuit limit of Rs 438.50 on the NSE. In three days, the stock has tumbled over 42 per cent, wiping out Rs 20,471.25 crore, from its market valuation.

One97, an associate PPBL, holds 49 per cent of the paid-up share capital (directly and through its subsidiary) of PPBL. *—PTI*

PMI hits 6-month high in January

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

PHOTO: PIXABAY

India's services PMI rose to a six-month high in January as new business expanded at a faster pace amid buoyant demand from domestic and external clients.The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Services PMI Business Activity Index rose to 61.8 in January, up from 59 in December, pointing to the sharpest rate of expansion in six months.

In Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) parlance, a print above 50 means expansion while a score below 50 denotes contraction.The survey is compiled from responses to questionnaires sent to a panel of around 400 service sector companies.

Ines Lam, Economist at HSBC said, "New business expanded at a faster pace and managers' expectation for future activity was strong. The new export business index accelerated, signalling that India's services exports remained robust," New export sales rose at the fastest pace in three months. Monitored firms signalled gains from clients across the globe, including Afghanistan, Australia, Brazil, China, Europe, the UAE and the US.

On the prices front, companies noted a further increase in their overall expenses at the start of the 2024 calendar year, with food, labour and freight identified as the key sources of cost pressures.However, with the vast majority of panellists opting to leave their charges unchanged and only 6 per cent hiking them, output prices rose to the lowest extent in 11 months.According to the survey, business confidence has strengthened further. Besides demand strength, firms expect investment and productivity gains to induce output growth in the year ahead. Meanwhile, the HSBC India Composite PMI Output Index rose from 58.5 in December to 61.2, indicating the sharpest upturn since mid 2023.

Service providers led the upturn, although both segments recorded faster rates of expansion in new business, the survey added. *—PTI*

Anarock raises ₹200cr for expanison

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

Real estate consultant Anarock on Monday announced it has raised Rs 200 crore from 360 One Asset Management for expansion and growth of its business amid strong consumer demand for residential and commercial properties.

"We have raised Rs 200 crore as equity funding from 360 One Asset. The amount will be utilised for expansion and growth of our business. We will also spend a lot on technology upgradation to provide better service to our clients," Anarock Chairman Anuj Puri told PTI.

He said the One Asset Management (earlier known as IIFL Asset Management), is Anarock's first equity investor.

Puri did not disclose the equity stake dilution in Anarock for raising the Rs 200 crore amount.

Homegrown Anarock was established by Puri in April 2017 after serving as country head for 10 years in an international property consultancy firm.

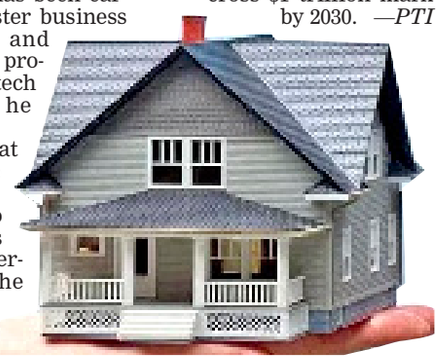
Anarock clocked Rs 440 crore revenue in the last fiscal and is expecting a 30 per cent growth this fiscal to around Rs 575 crore, riding on the surge in housing demand.

Puri said the equity investment would help the company to enhance its technology infrastructure, accelerate its expansion, and introduce new innovations.

Anarock aims to expand its market share in Indian real estate services space.

The capital has been earmarked for faster business expansion and fine-tuning its proprietary proptech platforms, he added.

He noted that this is the most opportune time to expand its reach and services as the Indian real estate sector is poised to cross $1 trillion mark by 2030. *—PTI*



₹600cr penalty for delay in PAN-Aadhaar linking: Govt

NEW DELHI,5 FEB

The Government collected Rs 601.97 crore from the public as penalty for not linking PAN with their Aadhaar from July 1, 2023 to January 31,2024. The last date for linking PAN with Aadhaar was 30 June, 2023. Representational Image.

The Government collected Rs 601.97 crore from the public as penalty for not linking PAN with their Aadhaar from 1 July, 2023 to 31 January ,2024. The last date for linking PAN with Aadhaar was 30 June, 2023. Representational Image.

PHOTO:PTI

The Government has collected over Rs 600 crore as penalty for delay in linking PAN with Aadhaar, and about 11.48 crore Permanent Account Numbers are still not linked with biometric identity, the Parliament was informed on 5 February.

"Number of PANs not linked with Aadhaar, excluding exempted categories, is 11.48 crore as on 29 January, 2024," Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply in the Lok Sabha. *—PTI*

- Government collected Rs 601.97 crore from the public as penalty for not linking PAN with their Aadhaar from 1 July, 2023 to 31 January ,2024

14,597 GST evasion cases in Apr-Dec

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

GST officers are using data analytic and artificial intelligence tools like Business Intelligence and Fraud Analytics to identify risky taxpayers suspected of passing or availing fake input tax credits, Parliament was informed on Monday.

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said a total of 14,597 cases of Goods and Services Tax (GST) evasion have been registered by central tax officers during April-December 2023.

A maximum number of such cases was registered in Maharashtra (2,716), followed by Gujarat (2,589), Haryana (1,123) and West Bengal (1,098).

"Various data analytic and artificial intelligence tools such as NETRA (Networking Exploration Tools for Revenue Augmentation), BIFA (Business Intelligence and Fraud Analytics) & ADVAIT (Advanced Analytics in Indirect Taxation) are being used to identify risky taxpayers, suspected of passing or availing fake input tax credit, including in the State of Andhra Pradesh," Chaudhary said.

GST intelligence officers have detected fake input tax credit (ITC) cases worth Rs 18,000 crore in April-December of the current fiscal and arrested 98 fraudsters/ masterminds.

Based on the feedback received from the field formations, these tools are updated/modified from time to time, he added.

Chaudhary said the GST registration process has robust checks in the form of physical verification of premises and Aadhar authentication.

The said checks have enabled in early detection of fraudulent registrations and also curbed fraudulent registrations to a great extent. *—PTI*

- A maximum number of such cases was registered in Maharashtra, followed by Gujarat

The tools are updated/modified from time to time PHOTO:PIXABAY

Airtel posts 54% rise in net profit to ₹2,442cr in Q3

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

PHOTO:PTI

Bharti Airtel on Monday posted a 54 per cent jump in consolidated net profit to Rs 2,442.2 crore in the December quarter, mainly on account of growth in high value customers.

Airtel prepaid mobile customers are required to pay at least Rs 155 for about a month-long service as the company had raised rates by 56 per cent in January 2023.Bharti Airtel Managing Director Gopal Vittal has indicated a need for further increase in mobile services rates. Return on investment made by the company is still low at 9.4 per cent.

The company had registered a profit of Rs 1,588.2 crore in the year-ago period, a regulatory filing said on Monday.Despite devaluation of African currencies during the period, the consolidated revenue from operations during the third quarter of the ongoing fiscal grew 5.8 per cent to Rs 37,899.5 crore from Rs 35,804.4 crore in the year-ago period.

"Revenue from India business sustained its momentum and grew sequentially by 3 per cent, while consolidated revenue was impacted by the devaluation of the Nigerian Naira and Malawian Kwacha," Bharti Airtel Managing Director Gopal Vittal said in a statement.

The total customer base of Bharti Airtel grew about 8 per cent on a year-on-year basis to 55.1 crore in the December quarter with India customer base growing to 39.7 crore, up 7.5 per cent.

The telecom firm's Africa customer base grew 9.1 per cent to 15.17 crore while its customer base declined marginally to 30 lakh.

India revenue of Airtel grew 11.4 per cent year-on-year to Rs 27,811 crore during the quarter. *—PTI*

Truecaller, Karnataka collab on Digital safety

BENGALURU, 5 FEB

Truecaller, the leading global communications and Caller ID platform collaborates with the Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeIT), Government of Karnataka to combat the growing incidents of cybercrime, impersonation, and fraud, and promote user safety in digital communication. Forged in the presence of Shri Priyank Kharge, Minister for Information Technology & Bio Technology and Rural Development & Panchayat Raj on the advent of Safer Internet Day, this initiative aims to empower citizens' cyber safety awareness and skills. As a part of this collaboration, Truecaller will carry out a series of initiatives to create awareness and build the capacity of citizens across the state to navigate the internet safely, and protect themselves from online harms, especially phone-based frauds and scams.Speaking on the collaboration, Shri Priyank Kharge, Minister for Information Technology & Bio Technology and Rural Development & Panchayat Raj said, "This partnership underscores the Government of Karnataka's commitment to prioritizing the safety of our citizens in the digital ecosystem. Cybercrimes and fraud in digital communication are growing at a rapid pace with advancing technology thus exposing vulnerable citizens to high risk. *—PTI*

SONY-ZEE MERGER CASE

Sony says disappointed with Singapore arbitrator's decision

NEW DELHI, 5 FEB

The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) on Thursday allowed the merger of Zee Entertainment Enterprises Ltd and Culver Max Entertainment (earlier known as Sony Pictures Networks India).

This order by the Mumbai bench, headed by HV Subba Rao and Madhu Sinha, will pave the way for the creation of a USD 10-billion media company.

The tribunal also dismissed all objections regarding the merger.

The NCLT, on 11 July, had reserved its order on the merger after hearing objections from several creditors.

It heard arguments from creditors, including Axis Finance, JC Flower Asset Reconstruction Co, IDBI Bank, Imax Corp and IDBI Trusteeship.

In December 2021, Zee Entertainment and Sony Pictures agreed to merge their businesses.

Both media houses approached the tribunal for sanctioning the merger after obtaining permissions from National Stock Exchange, BSE and sectoral regulators such as the Competition Commission of India and the Securities and Exchange Board of India.

However, the process stopped at the tribunal when a few creditors raised objections. Several creditors of Essel Group raised objections against the non-compete clause added to the scheme.NSE and BSE had informed the Mumbai bench of NCLT about two orders related to the Essel Group entities, where the promoters allegedly diverted funds from the listed entity for the benefit of their associate entities.

PHOTO: PTI

This also included the Securities Appellate Tribunal (SAT) order against Punit Goenka barring him from holding a directorial position in any listed company.SAT upheld SEBI the Securities and Exchange Board of India's (Sebi's) interim order which restrained both Zee Entertainment promoters Subhash Chandra and Punit Goenka from holding board positions in public listed companies for a year on account of alleged fund diversion.According to the creditors objecting to the merger, the order has a direct bearing as one of the integral parts of the scheme of merger is the appointment of Goenka as the Managing Director of the merged entity.

As there is a regulatory bar on Goenka holding such positions, the merger shouldn't go through, they submitted. *—PTI*

NZ vs SA, 1st Test: Ravindra cracks maiden double ton

MOUNT MAUNGANUI, 5 FEB

Rachin Ravindra's maiden double century and six-wicket haul on debut by South Africa skipper Neil Brand were the highlights as the Proteas ended the day second of the first Test against New Zealand trailing by 431 runs at Mount Maunganui on Monday. At the end of day one, SA was 80/4, with David Bedingham (29*) and Keegan Petersen (2*) unbeaten. New Zealand started their day at 258/2, with Kane Williamson (112*) and Rachin Ravindra (118*) unbeaten at the crease. Rachin and Kane started out things slow for Kiwis. But Ruan de Swardt struck early for Proteas, getting the prized wicket of Kane for 118 in 289 balls, with 16 fours. The star Kiwi batter was caught by Tshepo Moreki at mid-off. NZ was 271/3 after this 232-run partnership for the third wicket ended. Daryl Mitchell was next up on the crease. With a boundary by Rachin to Duanne Olivier in the mid-wicket region, the Kiwis reached their 300 runs in 102.2 overs. *—ANI*

Red Bull Formula 1 team boss is under investigation

NEW YORK, 5 FEB

Red Bull Formula 1 team boss Christian Horner is under investigation after a complaint was made against him, the company said on Monday. Red Bull said it took the allegations "extremely seriously" and has started an investigation. Horner, 50, oversaw Red Bull's record-breaking 2023 season in which the team won 21 of 22 races as Max Verstappen secured his third world title. Horner says he "completely denies" the allegations. "After being made aware of certain recent allegations, the company launched an independent investigation," Red Bull said in a statement. *—BBC News*

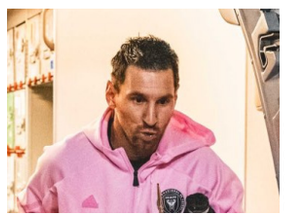


PHOTO: X

Fans are angry about not seeing injured Messi play

HONG KONG, 5 FEB

Hong Kong's sports minister on Monday reiterated the government's call for an explanation from the organizer of a soccer match between Inter Miami and a local team following widespread disappointment over Lionel Messi remaining on the bench throughout the entire game. The much-hyped exhibition match on Sunday ended with fans booing Inter Miami co-owner David Beckham and demanding refunds as Messi did not play in the game due to a hamstring strain. The fans' reaction was a setback for Hong Kong officials who sought to boost the city's image as a hub for mega events amid a slow economic recovery and Beijing's crackdown on dissidents. Secretary for Culture, Sports and Tourism Kevin Yeung said the government's funding agreement with the match organiser, Tatler Asia, required Messi to play on the field for at least 45 minutes, unless there were safety or health concerns. *—AP*

Jamshedpur registers comeback win against Mumbai

MUMBAI, 5 FEB

Jamshedpur FC sprung a surprise by striking thrice in the second half to round off an enthralling 3-2 victory against Mumbai City FC at the Mumbai Football Arena (MFA) in the Indian Super League (ISL) 2023-24 on Sunday. The Islanders saw their senior stars step up with Tiri and Alberto Noguera finding the back of the net in the 14th and 32nd minute of the game respectively, as per an ISL press release. However, the renewed spirit and belief prevalent in the Red Miners since Khalid Jamil took over as the head coach was evident in the final 45 minutes, with the visitors running circles around the home team and capping off a comeback that will infuse tremendous confidence within them moving ahead in this season. *—ANI*

INDIA BOUNCE BACK AGAINST 'BAZBALLERS'

Jasprit Bumrah becomes the player of the match

VISAKHAPATNAM, 5 FEB

Indian bowlers won an engrossing battle against England's firebrand batting for a series-levelling 106-run victory in the second Test here on Monday, blunting 'Bazball' with their resilience in a roller-coaster contest.

England began day four at 67 for one, chasing a record target of 399. They were bowled out for 292 in the extended afternoon session.

The visiting team's no holds barred approach, which has largely been successful, did not work on this occasion as India picked up nine wickets over the course of two sessions to bounce back in the five-match series.

The third Test will be played in Rajkot from 15 February. "You know winning a Test in these conditions is not easy. (I) wanted our bowlers to step up and they did that," said an elated India skipper Rohit Sharma.

Only Zak Crawley's (73 off 132 balls) strategy of mixing caution with aggression worked before the collective efforts of Jasprit Bumrah (3/46), R Ashwin (3/71), Axar Patel (1/75) and Kuldeep Yadav (1/60) yielded the desired results for the hosts who were under pressure going into day four. Bumrah picked up the Player of the Match honours for his overall haul of nine wickets in the game, ahead of young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal, who scored a crucial 209-run knock in India's first innings.

"He (Bumrah) is a champion player for us," reiterated Rohit.

After James Anderson claimed that India were nervous while batting in the second innings and did not know a safe target to counter 'Bazball', England walked the talk on Monday and went ballistic.

"Coming into this last innings, (we) had full belief in ourselves that we'll chase it down," England skipper Ben Stokes said at the end of the game. *—PTI*

Gill undergoes scans on injured finger, says he would be fine

VISAKHAPATNAM, 5 FEB

Indian batter Shubman Gill on Monday played down the finger injury which kept him off the field on the fourth day of the second Test against England here, revealing that scans have not thrown up anything of concern and he would be fine in the next few days. Though Gill batted on day 3, scoring a 147-ball 104 and playing a crucial role in India's 106-runs series-levelling win in the five-match rubber, he did not come out to field on Monday. Sarfaraz Khan substituted for him on the field. Gill had hurriedly left the ground at the end of day's play on Sunday after hurting his right index finger and after the match drew to a close on Monday, he revealed that he had gone for scans. *—PTI*

Ishan Kishan needs to start playing to be considered for selection: Dravid

Ishan Kishan needs to decide when he will start playing "some form of cricket" and then only can he be considered for national selection, head coach Rahul Dravid said on Monday addressing queries on his prolonged break from both international and domestic cricket. A regular member of the Indian team across formats not so long ago, Kishan has been missing from action since he asked for a break in the middle of the South Africa tour in December citing personal reasons. He last turned up for India in November and has not featured for Jharkhand in ongoing Ranji Trophy. After the series levelling win over England, Dravid tried to clear the air over Kishan's absence once again. "There is way back for anyone and everyone. I don't want to go on labouring about the Ishan Kishan point," said Dravid. *—PTI*

Indian players celebrate after winning the second Test match between India and England, at Dr YS Rajasekhara Reddy ACA-VDCA Cricket Stadium, in Visakhapatnam on Monday *PHOTO: X/BCCI*

FINAL SCOREBOARD

INDIA	ENGLAND
396	253
255	292

INDIA WIN BY 106 RUNS

Tech got it wrong, says Stokes

England captain Ben Stokes felt his opening batter Zak Crawley was at the receiving end of a 'wrong' DRS call for an LBW. Crawley was England's best batter in the game, scoring 76 and 73 in his two innings. On day four, he blended caution with aggression to put the Indian bowlers under pressure before being adjudged LBW off Kuldeep Yadav in a close DRS call before lunch. *—PTI*

DAVIS CUP

Sebastian Baez lifts Arg past Kazakhstan

ROSARIO, 5 FEB

Argentina reached the Davis Cup Finals group stage by eliminating Kazakhstan 3-2 in the best-of-five-match qualifying round when Sebastian Baez erased two match points and came back to edge Dmitry Popko 6-4, 3-6, 7-6 (6) on Sunday.

Belgium, Chile, the Czech Republic and France also wrapped up victories Sunday. Baez is a 23-year-old who is currently ranked a career-high No. 25. He reached the third round of the Australian Open last month before losing to eventual champion Jannik Sinner. Popko, 27, is ranked No. 338 and has failed in 16 attempts to qualify for a Grand Slam tournament.

Popko was in position to get Kazakhstan past 2016 Davis Cup champion Argentina, just one point away from winning while ahead 6-4 in the concluding tiebreaker. But from there, Baez grabbed the match's last four points. Belgium clinched its spot in the next round with a 3-1 victory over Croatia that was sealed when Zizou Bergs beat Duje Ajdukovic 6-1, 7-5 on Sunday. Bergs also won the opening singles match Saturday against 2014 U.S. Open champion Marin Cilic.

In Santiago, Chile, the hosts barely got past Peru 3-2 when Alejandro Tabilo came back to beat Ignacio Buse 2-6, 6-3, 6-2 in the deciding match. That followed Nicolas Jarry's 6-2, 6-4 win for Chile against Juan Pablo Varillas Patino-Samudio after Peru grabbed a 2-1 lead by taking the doubles earlier Sunday. *—AP*

U-19 WC: India firm favourites in SF clash against S Africa

Defending champions India have marched on into the semifinals on the back of five consecutive wins in the tournament *PHOTO: X/ICC*

BENONI, 5 FEB

Red-hot India will be firm favourites to book a place in the summit clash of the ongoing U-19 World Cup when they take on hosts South Africa in the first semifinal here on Tuesday.

Defending champions India have marched on into the semifinals on the back of five consecutive wins in the tournament, with their exciting talent putting up a fine all-round show to ensure their dominance. Across departments, it will be tough to point out a singular force behind India's juggernaut, particularly in last few games.

If the batters have buried the opponents under a mountain of runs, the bowlers have delivered wins that have exceeded a minimum of 130 runs in terms of margins.

With two centuries and a fifty, the 18-year-old Musheer Khan has lit up the tournament as he sits atop the list of batters with most runs in this edition, amassing 334 runs in five outings at 83.50.

Hot on his heels is India skipper Uday Saharan, who has led by example to rake up 304 runs with two fifties and a ton while averaging 61.60. Sachin Dhas has also given a fine example of himself, hitting a 116 in India's last Super Six game against Nepal after his side was put in a spot of bother at 62 for three.

Each of India's opponents have hitherto found it difficult to score runs off India vice-captain and left-arm spinner Saumy Kumar Pandey, whose enviable economy rate of 2.17 have helped him snare 16 wickets with three four-fors, placing him third in the list of most successful bowlers in this World Cup. Pandey's ability to keep a lid on the opposition batters with suffocating line and lengths in the powerplay have allowed India to dominate the proceedings with the ball in hand. *—PTI*

LA LIGA

Real Madrid's improvised defense faltered at the end, and Atletico scored a stoppage-time equalizer *PHOTO: X/ REAL MADRID*

Llorente snatches Atletico late draw against Madrid

MADRID, 5 FEB

Just a minute away from beating its city rival for the second time in less than a month and taking a four-point lead of the Spanish league, Real Madrid couldn't hang on.

Madrid's improvised defense faltered at the end, and Atletico Madrid scored a stoppage-time equalizer in a 1-1 draw on Sunday. Marcos Llorente scored with a header three minutes into added time after Brahim Díaz had put the hosts ahead in the first half at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium.

The late goal prevented Madrid from exploiting second-place Girona's 0-0 draw with Real Sociedad on Saturday. Madrid leads Girona by two points before the teams meet next week.

"We played a very good match, we were in control," Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said. "We were unlucky to concede that goal in the end, but we lacked height in the defense and we knew it." Ancelotti had a depleted defense because of injuries and had to improvise right back Dani Carvajal as a central defender alongside Nacho Fernández.

The duo couldn't cope with a cross into the area with a minute to go, and Memphis Depay headed the ball toward the goal and Llorente came in to score the equalizer, with the ball hitting the crossbar before going in.

"We worked hard the entire match and in the end we got rewarded," Llorente said. "We gained a point and kept them from getting more points. Considering the way things were going, it's a very valuable point for us."

Atletico, which had won four games in a row in all competitions, stayed in fourth place, 10 points off the lead. Diego Simeone's team was two points behind Barcelona, which won 3-1 at Alaves on Saturday. "The team could've given up but it kept fighting until the end and deserved the draw," Simeone said. *—AP*

Netherlands' Yibbi Jansen and Fay van der Elst etched their names on the scoresheet *PHOTO: X/IHF*

Indian women's team goes down 1-3 against Dutch

BHUBANESWAR, 5 FEB

The Indian women's hockey team lost 1-3 against the Netherlands in the FIH Hockey Pro League 2023/24 at Kalinga Hockey Stadium, Bhubaneswar on Sunday.

Netherlands' Yibbi Jansen (3', 34') and Fay van der Elst (21') etched their names on the scoresheet. Meanwhile, Navneet Kaur (9') scored the only goal for India, as per a press release from Hockey India.

India's goalkeeper Savita was called to action right from the get-go, saving successive shots at her goal. Soon after, the Netherlands were awarded a penalty corner and this season's leading goalscorer, Yibbi Jansen, powered a shot down the middle of the goal to grant the Netherlands an early lead.

As the Netherlands looked to sit back and absorb the pressure, an Indian counter-attack caught them by surprise. Sunelita Toppo ventured down the right wing and found Navneet Kaur at the top of the shooting circle who turned around and unleashed a thunderous strike that brought India back on level terms.

The Netherlands came close to scoring as the second quarter began when Pien Dicke dodged past the Indian defence but her shot hit the post and deflected away. *—ANI*

Tamil Nadu beat Goa by 7 wickets in Ranji Trophy Group C

PORVORIM, 5 FEB

Suresh Lokeshwar (52) and Pradosh Ranjan Paul (65) struck half-centuries to help Tamil Nadu complete the formalities and win their Ranji Trophy Group C match against Goa by seven wickets, here on Monday.

TN needed to score just 76 runs for the win after ending Day 3 on 61 for 1 from 26 overs. Overnight batters Lokeshwar and Paul completed their fifties but left the task of taking the team home to Baba Indrajith (7 not out) and Vijay Shankar (13 not out), as TN reached 142 for 3 in 49.5 overs chasing 137.

PHOTO: X/INSTAGRAM

Lokeshwar added 18 runs to his overnight score of 34 and he struck six fours during his 129-ball knock. Paul, on the other hand, was able to add 43 runs on the final day after resuming on 22. He decorated his 125-ball innings with six fours.

For Goa, Darshan Misal took two wickets while Suyash Prabhudessai got one. Arjun Tendulkar returned wicketless in the match, returning 2-0-5-0 in the Tamil Nadu's second innings after 10-0-52-0 in the first. He had made 1 and 8 with the bat.

TN collected six points from the win to take the top spot in Group C while Goa got none. In Chandigarh, the match between the home side and Punjab ended in a draw as there was no play possible on the fourth and final day, which also was the case on the third day. *—PTI*

FIFA: MEXICO TO HOST OPENER

2026 WC final will be played at MetLife Stadium

WASHINGTON, 5 FEB

The 2026 World Cup final will be played at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, beating out Texas and California for soccer's showcase game.

FIFA awarded the 19 July championship to the $1.6 billion venue, which opened in 2010, the culminating match of an expanded 48-nation, 104-game tournament that will be spread across three nations for the first time.

Located about 10 miles from Manhattan, MetLife was promoted by both New York and New Jersey, where the stadium was built in the Meadowlands marshes.

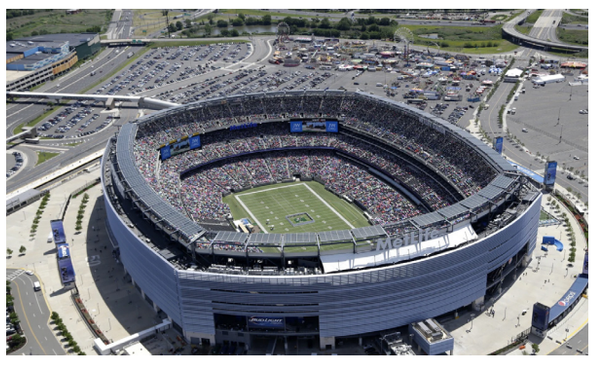
The land of Bruce Springsteen, Jon Bon Jovi and Frank Sinatra will be the focal point of the globe on that Sunday, when either Lionel Messi's Argentina will try to win its second straight title or a successor will emerge.

"It will be a celebration of our diversity and our values," New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy said in a telephone interview.

"The bigger picture is what leads up to it and what we leave behind for the decades to come."

FIFA made the announcement Sunday at a Miami television studio, allocating the opener of the 39-day tournament to Mexico City's Estadio Azteca on June 11 and the finale to the home of the NFL's New York Jets and Giants.

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones had lobbied for the final to be at his AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. "The competition was dealing with the perception of the coastal, of a New York, or a Los Angeles," he said. "If this were totally being played to just America and the United States, that wouldn't have been such a formidable thing to overcome. But internationally, that's formidable to overcome."



Located about 10 miles from Manhattan, MetLife was promoted by both New York and New Jersey *PHOTO: AP*

All games from the quarterfinals on are being played in the United States. Semifinals are on 14 July at AT&T and the following day at Mercedes Benz Stadium in Atlanta.

Quarterfinals are at Gillette Stadium in Foxborough, Massachusetts, on July 9, at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, California, the following day, and at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Missouri, and Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Florida, on 11 July. The third-place game will be at Hard Rock on 18 July.

The U.S. team will train in suburban Atlanta ahead of the tournament and open at SoFi on June 12. The Americans play seven days later at Seattle's Lumen Field and finish the group stage at SoFi on 25 June. *—AP*